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HITCHCOCK
the silent 'Blackmail' rediscovered

SHIRLEY MACLAINE
'The Apartment' and after

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CANNES 2012

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COSMOPOLIS

PLUS

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Cosmopolis | Cannes 2012 | Prometheus | Blackmail | Shindo and Yoshimura | Shirley MacLaine

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Robert Pattinson in David Cronenberg's 'Cosmopolis'

Next issue on sale 10 July

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Welcome. Thirty years ago, explosive body parts were what the directors of *Alien* and *Scanners* had in common. But while Ridley Scott (far left, and p.28) reaches for the stars with his 'origin of everything' epic *Prometheus*, David Cronenberg (left, and p.14) has gone the other way, shrinking his universe to the inside of a limousine in *Cosmopolis*. The latter was a star attraction – and one of a cavalcade of auto-themed works – at this years Cannes Film Festival, from which I report (p.20). And while that round-up looks forward to 20 films that'll be coming the way of our arthouse screens over the next 12 months, we're also looking back this month: over the careers of the late, great Japanese director Shindo Kaneto (p.42) and the redoutable Hollywood comedienne Shirley MacLaine (p.46), to Hugh Hudson's 1980s epic *Revolution* and to the greatest of all British silents, Hitchcock's *Blackmail* (p.34). **Nick James**

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NICK JAMES

FRENCH WITH TEARS

At Cannes this year a realisation dawned on me: *I'm not writing about French cinema very much.* I wondered why, despite such great films in recent years as *The Class* (2008) and *A Prophet* (2009), French cinema seemed to have been falling away as a subject for me. Cannes made this lack seem more real.

For the critics at the festival, the one serious controversy stirred up by the jury was that they ignored French director Leos Carax's *Holy Motors*. In this issue (see p.21), I praise Carax's film as "easily the freshest on view", though it's by no means a flawless work. What interested me most about it, however, was how it seemed to be the only French film that really mattered (Audiard's *Rust and Bone* sadly did not) – and how it divided opinion broadly along generational lines: outstanding for many under 40, while veterans treated it with circumspection.

There was stark disagreement within our own team. In his cover feature on David Cronenberg's *Cosmopolis* (p.14), Jonathan Romney thinks less of *Holy Motors* because "Carax stakes everything on his film being dreamlike" – the great excuse for being able to show what you like without reference to reality. In our Cannes rolling blog (see www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/), however, Demetrios Matheou calls it "an ambitious, brilliantly bonkers shot-in-the-arm to the Competition... mysterious and moving". It's not known if jury president Nanni Moretti had *Holy Motors* in mind when he commented after the awards ceremony, "Some filmmakers were more enamoured of their style than their characters" – but the nature of Carax's film and the lack of a prize make it likely.

I'm rehearsing these opinions here because the fuss around *Holy Motors* seems to indicate a small crisis in French cinema. The lack of films by women that was widely bemoaned before the festival began can be extended into a discussion about the lack of new French talent in general. In that context, *Holy Motors* signifies as the opposite of last year's *The Artist*. That film went on to enjoy a fate that in retrospect one might have guessed would happen. Having delighted almost everyone in Cannes, right across the board, with its bold recreation of silent-era entertainment, it was then boosted, with unparalleled success, for an Oscar triumph. This, of course, went hand in hand with a growing disdain from cinephile quarters. By the time it won Best Picture, with Harvey Weinstein behind it all the way, *The Artist* seemed almost as American as it was French.

To have a master of pastiche like Michel Hazanavicius promoted as the great new wonder of French cinema is – at least one imagines – a kind of heresy for the Godardians who still dominate French criticism. But the problem they face now is, who else can they turn to as a serious example of significant fresh local talent? Carax, Resnais and Audiard were all in competition, but as far as I can tell, none of the French films in the other strands made much of an impact. It's possible that this absence accounts at least in part for the frenzy with which Carax's film was seized upon as an arthouse pearl – though one that will surely have trouble at the box office.

Of course, French cinema still has many talented filmmakers whose names just roll off the tongue: Assayas, Cantet, Denis, Dumont, Hansen-Løve and Ozon, for starters, while several grand figures of the *nouvelle vague*/Left Bank scene are still with us – Godard, Resnais, Rivette and Varda being the most prominent. Creative French producers have been widening their influence by co-opting talents from around the world. France has always done this – Kieslowski being a prime example – but never more so than now. I'm wondering if this desire to transform the likes of Haneke and Kiarostami into French filmmakers – or at least, makers of French films – is happening at the expense of young local talent.

I'm wondering if this desire to transform the likes of Haneke and Kiarostami into French filmmakers is happening at the expense of young local talent

I don't know for sure, but it's worth finding out. Watching Resnais's anti-valedictory *You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet!*, I could imagine the anxiety of influence that must beset young filmmakers in France. The *nouvelle vague* and '68 generations have always been a heavy influence to bear, and the Resnais film seemed as institutional in its smugness as Audiard's *Rust and Bone* seemed contrived in its desire to please all. It may not matter that the best French film in Cannes was made by an Austrian. But it can't be a satisfactory situation that *Holy Motors* was the only French-directed film in Cannes that struck a chord.

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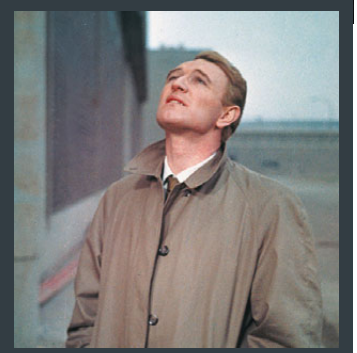
THE BIGGER PICTURE

The painted Desert

Antonioni had already created epoch-defining, haunting panoramas of ennui-ridden human figures dwarfed by the landscape in 'L'avventura', 'La notte' and 'L'eclisse', but with 1964's 'Red Desert' – his first colour film – his compositions reached still more radical and arresting heights. The film follows his muse Monica Vitti (above) as she wanders through a post-industrial landscape of fishing cabins, cooling towers and skeletal electricity pylons, while ambiguously flirting with one of her husband's colleagues (Richard Harris, right). Antonioni uses colour deliberately and sparingly to striking effect; he painted bold splashes of colour directly onto the drab features of the landscape in a way that serves to accentuate their discomfiting otherness. The film is back on the big screen at BFI Southbank and cinemas across the UK from 27 July.



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INTERVIEW

The future is behind you

Nick Bradshaw *takes a dip into open archives and Penny Woolcock's 'From the Sea to the Land Beyond'*

In the rich and occasionally revered world of archive (aka assemblage/bricolage/compilation/détournement/found-footage/mash-up/remix) film-making, appropriation rather than invitation tends to be the order of the day. No doubt many of its high flyers – Ken Burns, Bill Morrison, Andrei Ujica or Maciej Drygas – have upstanding relationships with their institutional sources; some, like Adam Curtis at the BBC, are lucky enough to work for the organisation whose stockrooms they scavenge; while Austria has such a fecund community of cut-up artists (Martin Arnold, Gustav Deutsch, Peter Tscherkassky), you wonder if an archive pass is part of the country's welfare accord. Still, the task of acquiring extant imagery, particularly from pop culture's corporate guardians and often for irreverent or critical reinterpretation, is onerous enough to make 'pirates' of the likes of Craig Baldwin, Mark Rappaport and Thom Andersen. And that's to say nothing of the mass of digitally enabled amateurs whose creativity is under siege from conservative judges and biddable politicians worldwide.

That said, there's a sense that film archives are becoming more proactive in bringing their wares to the public. Just within the UK, the BFI and 11 regional archives last year launched Search Your Film Archives, a partly viewable online catalogue of their respective holdings. This year the North West Film Archive released a 'Manchester Time Machine' iPhone app, putting seven decades of geolocated city street footage in your pocket. And the BBC and BFI have partnered the Arts Council on The Space, a collaborative, experimental digital channel for arts organisations to interact with audiences.

There's also been a trend of inviting filmmakers to rework archives, perhaps inspired by the success of Terence Davies's *Of Time and the City*. The production agency Forma corralled a host of regional and national bodies for Morrison's *The Miners' Hymns* in 2010, the same year the BFI dispatched the hauntology musician Mordant Music to mash up its Central Office of Information (COI) collection as *MisinforMation*. And since last year's reorganisations, the BFI has joined the BBC as a one-stop shop for production funds and archive access, a scenario already benefiting Julien Temple (for his London paean *BABYLON/DON*) and Ken Loach (for his welfare-state 'oral history' *Spirit of '45*).

'We didn't want to do a nostalgia thing, but it's hard not to – it all gets so shit'

First, though, the versatile Penny Woolcock joins the ranks with *From the Sea to the Land Beyond*, a found-footage tapestry of British coastal life commissioned by Sheffield Doc/Fest and transmedia agency Crossover, and stitched together (with editor Alex Fry) from four BFI collections: Mitchell and Kenyon, Topical Budget newsreels, British Transport Films and the COI. When I went to see them midway through a five-week edit, they were working to a scratch track of old recordings by – who else? – British Sea Power, with a new soundtrack pending before the film's unveiling at Doc/Fest.

What was the attraction of diving into the past? "The idea of doing something where nobody would want to kill me," Woolcock laughs, citing opposition to her 2009 gang musical *1 Day* from the West Midlands police. She was relishing the novelty of unmetered access to archive footage, too ("It's usually so expensive"), and of being able to experiment with "purely visual", voiceover-free storytelling, away from TV commissioning editors who mandate that a documentary tell its audience "what's going to happen, what just happened, what is happening..."

To judge from a rough cut, the film's subject is indeed the tides of time, the montage finding poetic links and changes as it sketches a social history of 20th-century Britain through coastal labour and recreation. Workers leaving a factory stare with healthy naivety at the novel camera; Edwardians conduct bizarre aquatic contests in hat and tails, for amusement and perhaps for war training. Industry grows, and the filmmaking becomes more confident – there's a stirring dolly shot up and over a huge ship in the making.

As Woolcock notes, most of these films were shot as state propaganda; but they also express an idealism, asserting the lives of ordinary citizens rather than the rich and mighty. Then there's a tipping point: female revellers become beauty contestants become pictures in the paper; women disappear from the workplace; industry disappears and people grow fat; docklands become real estate; stockbrokers invade the fish market.

And, of course, film turns to video. For someone who hasn't dwelled in archives before and says she didn't look to prior templates, Woolcock seems to have slipped easily into the conditional-perfect hauntological mode: "We didn't want to do a nostalgia thing, but it's hard not to – it all gets so shit."

It's not just Woolcock and Fry who get to delve into this stuff. *From the Sea* will also be online at The Space, alongside some 350 minute-long clips from the same archives; you can mix and match up to four on a virtual 'postcard' with different BSP tracks and send them off to your friends. The project is curated by Crossover's Mark Atkin, who agrees this is just a first lick of the interaction archives are looking for: "People are warming to a sense of what's possible. There's a hell of a lot of future in the past."

■ *'From the Sea to the Land Beyond' is online at thespace.org from early June, and screens with a live British Sea Power accompaniment in Sheffield on 13 June and at the BFI Southbank on 15 June*

IN PRODUCTION

● **Federico Fellini** famously once had a 'lost' 48 hours in Los Angeles while on his way to the 1957 Oscars, and a new film is to portray a speculative version of what he got up to. 'Fellini Black and White', written and directed by Henry Bromell and starring Brazilian actor Wagner Moura as Fellini, will suggest the director's disappearing act involved taking in jazz, surfing and romance with a vet lover.

● **Guillermo del Toro** has signed up to co-direct a new stop-motion animated version of 'Pinocchio', to be produced by the Jim Henson Company. Del Toro will direct alongside Mark Gustafson, animation director on Wes Anderson's 'Fantastic Mr. Fox'. Production on the film will follow the completion of del Toro's forthcoming 'Pacific Rim', which is in post-production.

● **Simon Pegg and Nick Frost**, the stars of 'Shaun of the Dead' and 'Hot Fuzz', are to reunite with the films' director Edgar Wright to make 'The World's End', the third film in their loose 'Cornetto Trilogy'. The story reportedly focuses on five childhood friends who reunite 20 years after an epic pub crawl. Wright will direct, and will co-write the script with Pegg.

● **Suzuki Seijun**'s 1963 film 'Youth of the Beast', which starred Jo Shishido as a disgraced former policeman who infiltrates two Yakuza gangs in order to clear his name, is to be remade in English by John Woo, under the title 'Day of the Beast'.

● **Pedro Almodóvar**'s next film, 'Los amantes pasajeros', is in pre-production with a view to a summer shoot for a 2013 release. Written and directed by Almodóvar (below), the comedy stars Javier Cámara, Cecilia Roth and Lola Dueñas, and follows a group of travellers caught in a life-threatening situation aboard a plane flying to Mexico City.

FESTIVAL

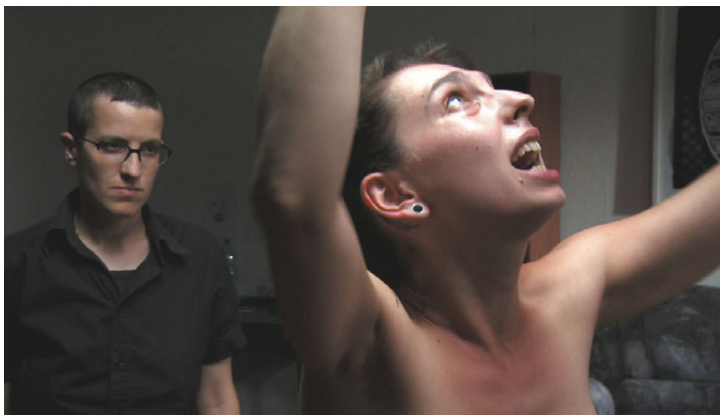
Fifty years of provocation

Kieron Corless *is thrilled by the incendiary talent on show at the Oberhausen festival*

How best to mark the 50th anniversary of the Oberhausen Manifesto, an energy flash detonating a series of rude awakenings, present and future shocks, subtle extensions of the domain of political and formal enquiries in German cinema? The answer at this year's Oberhausen Short Film Festival turned out to be rarely less than scintillating. A wide-ranging programme 'Mavericks, Mouvements and Manifestos' covered not only the work of the manifesto's original signatories – several revelations right there – but also that of other German filmmakers who started their careers around the same time, together with a smartly curated survey of ruptures and breakaway groupings in other countries in the 1950s and 60s.

The precedence of 'mavericks' in the title suggested this wasn't going to be a tidy piece of curatorial housekeeping, but one where surprises, heterogeneous elements – what co-curator Olaf Möller called "skewed vantage points" – would be foregrounded. A process of recovery but also a reactivation; not a nostalgic glance back, but a dynamic conversation between now and then.

Of the Oberhausen signatories, the discovery for me was Ferdinand Khittl, whose *The Magic Ribbon* (*Das magische Band*, 1959) and *Wholesale Market* (*Grossmarkthalle*, 1958) captivated by virtue of their light touch and perfect rhythms. Best of the non-German films were the Japanese Image Art Society documentaries, especially the triple projections in *For My Crushed Right Eye* (*Tsuburakakatta migime no tame ni*, 1968), a fitting formal response to tumultuous times. Echoes and correspondences within and across national boundaries began to push forward: ethnographic impulses, alongside an almost remorseless turning of the lens on one's own society and people; documentary overlaid with fictional elements to create unnameable hybrids; experimental assemblages of different materials, including animation.



House of pain: Roee Rosen's 'Out' was intelligent and fearlessly confrontational

With so much rare historical material to savour, all of it projected, it was hard to drag myself away to other strands in the festival, but I'm happy I did, because there were two major discoveries to make. Israeli artist Roee Rosen's triptych *Out* (*TSE*, 2010) is like a shower of sparks. It opens in recognisable talking-heads doc-land, then slams you into a profoundly politicised, hardcore sadomasochistic exorcism involving the same two women, before rounding off with a beautiful live rendition of a haunting lament. All in the same room, and shot in just one day. One other attendee was pondering its inclusion in their *Sight & Sound* all-time top ten, such is its unsparing intelligence and fearlessly confrontational impact.

I suspect few in the UK are familiar with Austrian artist and filmmaker Linda Christanell, but based on what little I saw here, she seems a major figure. Her *Anna* (1981) was the best film I saw at the festival, a delicate, spellbinding search for the artist's traces of herself in the portrait of a close friend, incorporating – as in many of her films, it seems – a collection of charged objects and old photos, set against a ticking pendulum rhythm with occasional fragments of 30s music. Haunting and hypnotic, it left me kicking myself I'd missed her other shorts.

But such is the way of film festivals sometimes – if you're lucky. Oberhausen specialises in concentrated, galvanising shots of pure adrenaline, and in this edition they came at us fast and furious. Fifty years after the manifesto, Oberhausen is still right there in the thick of it.

■ *'Provoking Reality', a two-DVD set of 19 films directed, produced, shot or edited by the original signatories of the Oberhausen Manifesto, is now available*

THE NUMBERS

Packing a punch

Gareth Evans's 'The Raid' has broken out beyond the fanboy niche, writes **Charles Gant**

Most Asian martial-arts movies never get beyond a DVD or genre festival release in the UK, and it had been more than five years since the likes of *Ong-Bak* and *Infernal Affairs* broke out of the fanboy niche. But when the UK's Momentum Pictures saw footage of *The Raid* in Cannes 2011, the company immediately saw the potential of the Jakarta-set action film, and together with parent Alliance Films were the first to buy territory rights on the title (UK and Canada). Directed by Gareth Evans, a Welshman living in Indonesia, the film was shaping up to be "a nice hybrid between Western and Eastern cinema", says Momentum publicity manager Mark Jones. "It was *Die Hard* meets *Hard Boiled*, and there hadn't been a film like that in a long while."

Initially considered for a UK release in the 100 to 120-screen range, targeting "intelligent action and movie fans", according to the company's theatrical sales director Andy Waller, *The Raid* in fact opened at 297 cinemas, the second-widest foreign-language release ever in the UK and Ireland, after Mel Gibson's *Apocalypto*.

With significant investment from the British Film Institute's P&A Fund, Momentum was able to afford a heavyweight advertising spend, including TV and digital escalator panels on London Underground. And an 18 May release date, in the midst of summer blockbuster season, positioned the film as a fresh alternative to Hollywood action fare.

Momentum took encouragement from critical and online buzz, beginning with the world premiere last September in the Midnight Madness strand of the Toronto International Film Festival, and continuing with Sundance and SXSW. Says Waller, "The critical response became so consistent that the language and origin of the film felt increasingly secondary, if not irrelevant, when considering the size of our release." Recognising that the film was different to upmarket historical epics such as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, the strategy was to position it simply as "one of the best action films ever". An "eye-poppingly violent" red-band trailer was great for engaging the core audience online, but little use in cinemas. Liaising with UK censor the BBFC, Momentum was able to achieve a 12A trailer preferencing "action and spectacle" over gore, and hence reach audiences watching the likes of *Avengers Assemble*, *Battleship* and *The Hunger Games*.

The result is a box-office number significantly ahead of direct competitor titles, although it should be acknowledged that *The Raid* benefited from a significantly wider release than the likes of *Ong-Bak*. Momentum has virtually no chance of recouping hefty marketing costs from theatrical revenues, but is well positioned to cash in on DVD.

Foreign action at UK box office

Film	Year	Gross
Kung Fu Hustle	2005	£1,320,932
The Raid	2012	£805,399*
Night Watch	2005	£708,535
Day Watch	2007	£385,140
Old Boy	2004	£315,698
Ong-Bak	2005	£316,472
Infernal Affairs	2004	£294,717
District 13	2006	£277,561
Shaolin Soccer	2004	£199,971

Excludes historical epics. *Gross after 10 days

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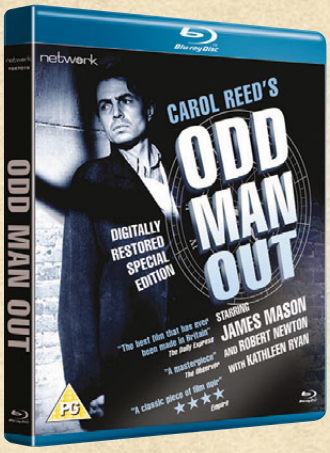

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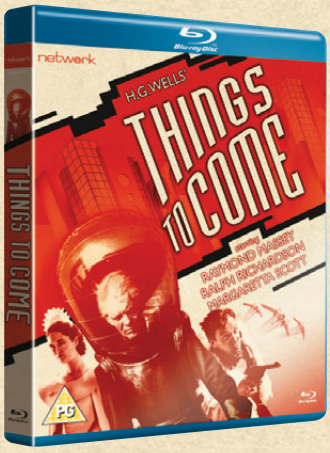

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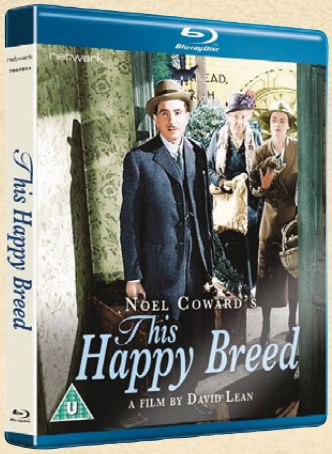

Noel Coward's anthem to British resilience became the most successful film of 1944.

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LOST & FOUND

Till death do us part

Elaine May's 1971 black comedy 'A New Leaf' may have been butchered by the studio, but the end result is still glorious, writes **Ryan Gilbey**

Elaine May is nobody's idea of obscure. This birdlike woman, now 80 years old, began pecking away at American mores in the 1950s as part of a hip, witty double act with Mike Nichols. The duo released bestselling albums of their routines and played a year-long, sellout run on Broadway. May later directed four movies, three of which she also wrote, as well as scripting many others, some credited (*The Birdcage* and *Primary Colors* for Nichols), some not (*Tootsie*, *Reds*). Occasionally she acted, most recently as a thrift-shop ditz in *Small Time Crooks*. So what is she doing in a column dedicated to films that have slipped through the cracks?

Regrettable as it is that the movies she directed are either out of circulation (*A New Leaf*), little seen (*The Heartbreak Kid*, *Mikey and Nicky*) or unfairly eclipsed by financial failure and dim-bulb consensus (*Ishtar*), there is something fitting about May winding up in the lost property box. Even at her most popular, she gravitated towards elusiveness or anonymity. To a reporter writing a profile of her, she made an unusual request: "I'd appreciate it if you didn't mention my name in your article." The sleevenotes on the Nichols/May album *Improvisations to Music* contained in place of the usual artist biography the enigmatic message: "Miss May does not exist." Nichols broke away to become a director but May vanished so comprehensively that *Life* magazine was already moved to run a 'Where is she now?' feature by 1967. Perhaps she was secretly thrilled by that.

It wasn't this aversion to attention that led to May trying to have her name removed from *A New Leaf*, her 1971 debut as writer and director. After a rumoured ten months of editing, she submitted a three-hour cut to Paramount. (Editing has been a battleground for this director: it was said she shot 1.4 million feet of footage for *Mikey and Nicky*, three times the amount exposed for *Gone with the Wind*.) Would you be shocked to learn that Paramount, with Robert Evans as its head of production, did not go gaga for a three-hour black comedy? The studio snatched the film from May and pruned it to 102 minutes. Another sorry tale of a director's vision disfigured by the marketplace. Except that *A New Leaf*, in its studio-sanctioned edit, is perfect.

Murder in mind: Walter Matthau's Henry plans to marry and kill Elaine May's Henrietta

The film, adapted from Jack Ritchie's short story 'The Green Heart', begins with the wealthy New York loafer Henry Graham (Walter Matthau) discovering that a life of Ferraris and fine dining has depleted his collateral. "I'm poor," he whimpers as serene birdsong floods the soundtrack and Gayne Rescher's camera trails him woozily through the streets; he drops in on his tailor to say farewell, and caresses forlornly his Mancunian butler, Harold (the glorious George Rose). It is Harold who suggests that a well-chosen spouse might save Sir from penury. "Marriage?" splutters Henry. "To a woman?" He comes around to the idea when it occurs to him that he could bump off this wife and keep the loot. "I'm going to find a suitable woman," he announces to Harold, "and mur–*marry* her."

Even at her most popular, Elaine May gravitated towards anonymity

That poor sap is Henrietta, a millionaire botanist played by May herself with glasses like bicycle wheels, a hungry, lopsided mouth and a full set of butterfingers. "She's perfect!" exclaims Henry when he sees her fumbling with her teacup at a society function. His attorney has already used disdainfully the same adjective about him ("You're perfect!"). So we have Henry and Henrietta, both accustomed to prodigious wealth and both ironically "perfect". We know where this is heading: the killer in waiting and the victim to be will surely prove an ideal match.

Well, yes and no. The distinctive tone of *A New Leaf* arises from its commitment to Henry's gruesome plan until the last possible moment. He packs *A Beginner's Guide to Toxicology* as his honeymoon reading, and responds to Henrietta's apologies for being so clumsy by telling her soothingly: "It's OK, it's not for long." But soon he inadvertently starts acting in her best interests. He fires her staff when he discovers they have been stealing from her. And even as he plans her downfall, he is snipping the price tags from the clothes she is wearing, and generally making her fit to go out in public ("She has to be vacuumed every time she eats"). The movie hinges on Matthau's ability to convince us that Henry is oblivious to his own fondness for Henrietta. As long as that self-awareness is buried, we can never be entirely sure that his Bluebeard fantasy won't come to fruition, which lends the film a tingle of danger beneath its daftness.

Matthau, widely loved as a comic grump but still underrated as an actor, has never been more skilful than in this balancing act between inspiring revulsion and affection. All clammy jowls and acrobatic eyebrows, he rails against co-habitation ("I don't want to share things – I want to own them all by myself") while allowing tenderness to complicate his disgust, never more so than when Henry spends several patient minutes retrieving his hapless bride from within the Grecian gown in which she has become entangled. (Roger Ebert reports having heard more audience laughter during this scene than in anything since *The Producers* three years earlier.) May's longer cut is said to include a subplot involving a blackmailer, played by William Hickey, as well as several murder scenes, but any mourning over the absent footage can only be theoretical when the extant film feels so glorious and complete.

Marriage took another pasting in May's next film *The Heartbreak Kid*, about a man who wants what he hasn't got – a warped mirror-image of *A New Leaf*, in which Henry ends up getting, and liking, the opposite of what he wants. Neither film is sentimental about love, but it is *A New Leaf* that represents the more miraculous achievement in wresting from domestic torment a plausibly happy ending. Or rather, an ending that is realistic about the compromises required to be happy.

What the papers said

"A beautifully and gently cockeyed movie... Not since the two-reelers of the 1930s in which Edgar Kennedy, the genius of the slow-burn, made his accommodation with the idiocies of Florence Lake, his bird-brained wife, have there been displays of anger, frustration and greed as marvelous as those of Matthau in 'A New Leaf'. Although Miss May's approach to the writing and directing of film comedy is pretty consistently at the blackout-sketch level, reminiscent of her collaborations with Mike Nichols, the quality of the sketches in 'A New Leaf' is so consistently high, and its cartoon characters are so human, that criticism of its form becomes academic. The entire project is touched by a fine and knowing madness."
Vincent Canby, 'New York Times', 1971

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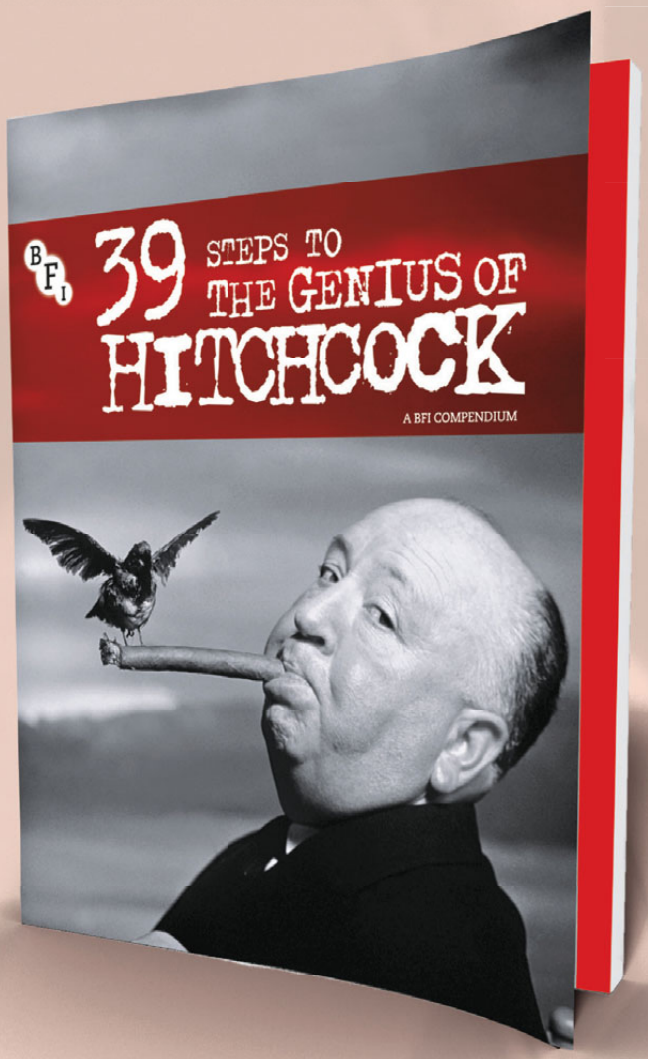

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MR BUSY

Accentuate the dispositif

Major transformations are taking place as a result of the digital revolution – not just technological ones, but in the business models and procedures

Call me a snob. For many years I've lived in Brighton, which has an annual arts festival of ever-growing sophistication and allure. But I never go. Why? Because it happens at the start of May – and so does Cannes. Citing *force majeure* but more probably because it's a good excuse, I never book anything at home and concentrate instead on Cannes. What was it Dorothy said about your own backyard? (Although I've been to Kansas and I'm not sure she was right.)

Anyway, a few weeks back I got an invitation to the opening of a Brighton Festival show organised by the University of Brighton School of Art and the festival's film arm, Cinecity, celebrating Patrick Hamilton's hallucinatory 1941 novel *Hangover Square*, significant chunks of which are set in Brighton. So off we went, Mrs Busy and I. And it was great, suggesting that all that's been stopping me from going to Brighton Festival events was not so much that I couldn't be arsed as, more prosaically, I hadn't been asked. Snobbery again. Terrible to realise, so close to the end of this column's life (next month's will be the last).

But what fascinated me about the *Hangover Square* exhibition was not so much what it was, as the way it chimed with issues with which I have been grappling (and not solving) for a lot of this column's life. What it was is this (spoiler alert for anyone who hasn't read the book). Students at the School of Art – working with artist and production designer Anna Deamer, under the supervision of Steve Deane, lead carpenter on *Downton Abbey* – built life-size, walk-through models of two of the novel's key settings: Netta's sordid Earls Court flat and the Brighton hotel room occupied by George Harvey Bone on the first of his two visits.

Only six people at a time are allowed into each room, which meticulously reproduces the furnishings and shabby comforts of September 1939, when the key scenes of the novel are set – and when the rest of the world's attention was directed towards things other than the sad, beer-and-whisky-fuelled longings of George Harvey Bone. The exhibition even reproduces the bizarre system of threads with which George decks the room after murdering Netta and her lover with a number-seven golf club.

Hangover Square is one of the great British novels: it is suffused with the atmosphere of 1930s Britain, its language at once dated and surreal, like Wodehouse or Waugh without the epigrams. The exhibition was a fascinating exercise in time-slip, constructed to the highest possible standards and possibly (I admit to lack of expertise here) scoring high as an art installation. But, despite being billed as "a film set for an imaginary screen version of *Hangover Square*", its connection to film – to cinema – was, at best, tangential. Which, paradoxically, is what made it so fascinating – and also put it at the heart of the current debate about film/cinema.

As everyone must know, major transformations are taking place in the film business as a result of the digital revolution – not just technological ones, but in the business models and procedures built up over the past 100 years. At the same time, however, a major realignment is taking place on what we might call Planet Film Theory (think of it as a small, shrinking, angrily proud place that no one seems to like). True, infighting and dissent have always been the behavioural norm on Planet Film Theory. But the digital revolution has recently thrown into question what has always seemed to be its one core belief – what one might call Article 1 of Planet Film Theory's constitution: André Bazin's writings on the ontology of the photographic image.

Bazin noted the mechanical, unmediated way in which an object in front of the camera is recorded onto filmstock and, once processed, projected onto the screen. A scene becomes an image, with no fundamental change in its ontology – the nature of its being. With digital technology, however, a physical transformation takes place. Anything in front of the camera is converted into a digital code which, when displayed, allows for no difference between something recorded (shot) or something created (through, for example, CGI); as far as the digital transmitter (disc or hard drive) is concerned, there is no difference.

Travel a little deeper into the dark heart of Planet Film Theory, into Foucault County and Deleuze Parish, and you will find another key notion also beginning to wobble: the *dispositif* – that mesh of discourses, philosophical underpinnings and material structures that determine 'cinema'. Clearly, the old idea of a piece of celluloid run through a cinema projector in a darkened hall will no longer do. The words themselves – 'film' and 'cinema' – have shed their original meanings and become historical metaphors.

So why did the *Hangover Square* exhibition trigger all these thoughts? Well, as I said before, it's in the nature of this column to raise questions rather than answer them. But, even if the exhibition had many of the aspects of the cinema *dispositif*, was it cinema? A film set that would never be part of a film? No actors, action, camera, projection – but, on the other hand, a kind of narrative formed of objects: like evidence in an Agatha Christie novel, holding hints of story. But most of all because, although it is de rigueur on Planet Film Theory never to translate *dispositif*, one of its many (other) meanings is... a (film or stage) set. Strange times we live in.

Nick Roddick

EVENTS

- **The London Indian Film Festival** opens with the UK premiere of Anurag Kashyap's gangster epic 'Gangs Of Wasseypur', and closes with 'Baishey Srabon' ('Seventh August'), starring Raima Sen. In between, a host of other UK premieres of Indian features will screen, as well as a programme of Indian experimental cinema, showing at Tate Modern, and a programme of new shorts. Various venues across London, 20 June-3 July. See www.londonindianfilmfestival.co.uk for full details
- **Gregory J. Markopoulos**, the Greek-American experimental filmmaker who died in 1992 after having removed much of his work from circulation, is the subject of a long overdue revival. His former patner Robert Beavers is raising funds to preserve and make viewable again Markopoulos's 80-hour magnum opus, the 'ENIAIOS' cycles, via his 'Temenos' project. Two of the films in the cycle are due to be screened in Greece this summer. For details on how to donate to the project see www.kickstarter.com/projects/1525866264/towards-eniaios-and-the-temenos?ref=live
- **London on Film** is a live-music event that features music taken from films set in London, performed by the BBC Concert Orchestra. Music to be performed includes Bernard Herrmann's score from 'Hangover Square', John Barry's from 'The Ipcress File', Pete Townshend's from 'Quadrophenia', and Howard Shore's from 'Eastern Promises'. Southbank Centre, London, 11 June.
- **Warren Beatty** may have faded into semi-retirement and his biopic of Howard Hughes may be unlikely ever to materialise, but his earlier achievements as an actor, director and producer are screening in a retrospective this month. It takes in early films such as 'All Fall Down' and 'Mickey One', hits from his heyday such as 'Bonnie and Clyde', 'Shampoo' (below) and 'Reds', and later efforts including 'Bulworth'. No room for 'Ishtar', alas... BFI Southbank, London, until 30 June.

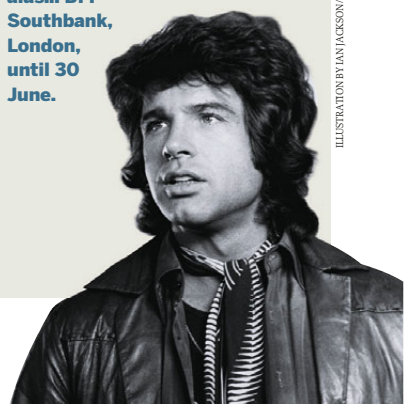


ILLUSTRATION BY IAN JACKSON/BFI STILLS, POSTERS AND DESIGNS (1)

A WOMB WITH A VIEW

With his film 'Cosmopolis', largely confined to the interior of a stretch limo, David Cronenberg has transformed Don DeLillo's 2003 zeitgeist novel into something altogether stranger and more compelling. The director talks to **Jonathan Romney**

Received wisdom has it that only bad novels, or at least disposable ones, stand a chance of becoming good films. Supposedly, any attempt to film a good novel is doomed to failure – or at best to result in quixotic half-measures. But that a prestigious book by a major writer should actually improve in translation to the screen is, according to this unspoken law, unheard of. Yet this is the case with David Cronenberg's *Cosmopolis*, based on the 2003 novel by Don DeLillo, in which a young billionaire financier, Eric Packer, crosses Manhattan in a stretch limo and contemplates the downfall of Western capitalism, while cruising in search of a haircut and his own ultimate perdition. It's like the Forbes 100's *Journey to the End of the Night*.

In Cronenberg's sleek, eerily numbed reimagining of the book, Packer is played by erstwhile *Twilight* heartthrob Robert Pattinson, clearly no stranger to limo living. By bizarre coincidence, *Cosmopolis* was one of two white-limo fantasias in the Cannes competition, the other being Leos Carax's *Holy Motors*, in which the car is occupied by a protean existential everyman. For my money, *Cosmopolis* is by far the stranger of the two films, ➡

HERE IN MY CAR
Eric Packer (Robert Pattinson, right) in the back of the stretch limousine that forms a microcosm of his world in David Cronenberg's film of Don DeLillo's 'Cosmopolis'

because Carax stakes everything on his film being dreamlike, while Cronenberg, more challengingly, weaves a texture of nightmare out of material that, ostensibly at least, derives from a realist musing on How We Live Today.

Screened near the tail end of the Cannes competition, *Cosmopolis* was arguably the official selection's hottest ticket. That was partly because of a punchy, tantalising trailer that – one now realises – is audaciously misleading with its quickfire barrage of images of glamour, violence and chaos: men and women aiming guns, a dancefloor frenzy, street riots, and what looked like a dinosaur on Fifth Avenue (it turns out to be a giant papier-maché rat). All these images are indeed seen in the film, but what we get is something richer and stranger than the trailer suggests.

For a start, *Cosmopolis* proves mesmerisingly slow; it moves, like Packer's gridlocked car, at glacier pace. The action takes place largely in the back of the limo, an insulated capsule where Packer sits like a king, his display screens emitting eerie blue light, flickering with (to quote DeLillo) "flowing symbols and alpine charts... polychrome numbers pulsing". This data maps the world finance market, on which Eric has over-borrowed insane figures in the Chinese currency the Yuan, bringing about his own ruin and triggering the collapse of the world economy (something less clear than it is in the book, where the compromising currency is the Yen). The car is a space capsule, occupied by a lonely Major Tom of world finance – a plutonaut, if you like.

The car has been "prousted" to Eric's requirements – cork-lined, soundproofed like Proust's study, and it similarly becomes a space for language to flourish. It's a venue for assorted conferences, quasi-therapeutic sessions, sexual encounters. The specialists drop by in succession: among them, Packer's chief of technology Shiner (a nervy Jay Baruchel); art dealer Didi Fancher (Juliette Binoche), with whom Packer has sex before they discuss the viability of his buying the Rothko Chapel; head of theory Vija Kinski (Samantha Morton); and a doctor who gives Eric his daily health check, including a rectal examination, while Eric flirts feverishly with his finance chief Jane Melman (Emily Hampshire). There are other encounters outside the car, including seemingly accidental meetings with Elise, the poet wife (Sarah Gadon) who Packer hardly knows; a spat with pie-throwing provocateur André Petrescu (Mathieu Amalric), choreographed along the lines of the manic skirmishes in Godard's *Détective*; and ultimately a meeting with the proverbial Disgruntled Former Employee, deranged Unabomber-like Benno Levin (Paul Giamatti), who has sworn to kill Packer.

The film is essentially a series of dialogues staged in a closed space: at once mobile symposium and peripatetic chamber theatre. The superiority of Cronenberg's *Cosmopolis* over DeLillo's is paradoxical in that the film is an unusually faithful adaptation of the original. After producer Paolo Branco proposed the project to him, Cronenberg wrote the script in a mere six days, and could do so, he says, because DeLillo's dialogue was already so perfect – indeed, the film's dialogue comes across pretty much as a transcription of DeLillo's very particular dialogue, which veers between hard-boiled telegraphic and theoretically abstract. (An example at random from the book, Eric to Jane Melman: "My mood shifts and bends. But when I'm alive and heightened, I'm super-acute. Do you know what I see when I look at you? I see a woman who wants to live shamelessly in her body. Tell me this is not the truth.")

'He's created this world. It's a protection, like a bomb shelter, but then you're trapped inside'

In Cannes, Cronenberg tells me of his admiration for DeLillo's language. "To me it's a little like Harold Pinter dialogue. It's based in reality, in observation – in that American people do speak like that, compared with English people or Australians – and yet there is an element of stylisation. I know people who talk like that. It's real but it's also surreal. Any movie you're making, we all know that they're playing a role, they are actors – there's an element of collaboration with your audience in terms of the suspension of disbelief."

Many reviewers, however, weren't so enthusiastic about the novel or its linguistic textures. In *The New York Times*, Walter Kirn complained that DeLillo's characters were "barely corporeal cerebral entities" who spoke like "Palm Pilots with lips". For sure, DeLillo's conversations are hard to swallow on the flat page; yet, once the words are put into living people's mouths on screen, something peculiar happens: it becomes Cronenbergian. Formal, stilted and hyper-self-conscious as the exchanges are (John Updike, reviewing the book, referred to the dialogue's "terse, deflective, somewhat lobotomised quality"), on screen they acquire a new sharpness and wit. Cronenberg has found comedy in this language that perhaps DeLillo wasn't fully aware of.

Closed world

In strictly narrative terms, *Cosmopolis* is remarkably undramatic. Things happen, chaos explodes in Eric's orderly "microtimed" existence – yet incident washes off his back. It's as if nothing really happens to him, so insulated is he in his car. In one scene, he goes on talking coolly while the limo is rocking, demonstrators attacking it and graffiting it with spray cans – yet this might as well be taking place in another universe.

The car occasionally opens up to let others in at Eric's behest, but it repels invaders. That's why the film is generally most compelling when confined to its enclosure; that Eric occasionally steps outside rather compromises the unity of place, and it would have been something if the whole film had been pulled off entirely in this ambulant *huis clos*. Created by production designer Arv Grewal, the limo is a dark, opulent womb, with windows that turn opaque black to further exclude the exterior world. Thanks to greenscreen, we are distractedly aware of Manhattan slowly, soundlessly scrolling by outside the windows, as if not actually seen but brought to Eric by live transmission from light years away.

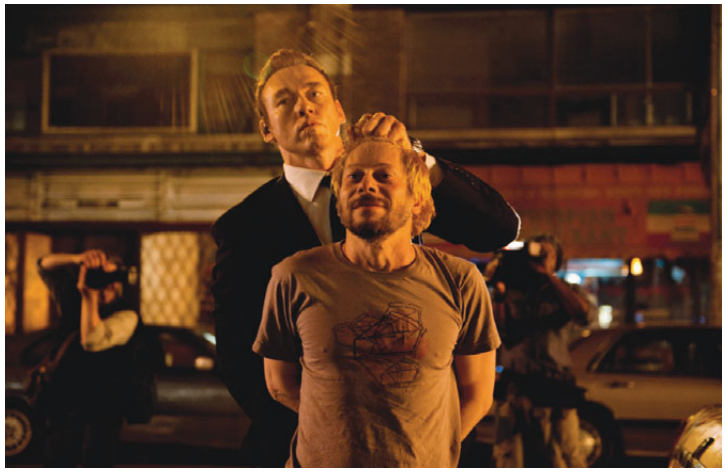
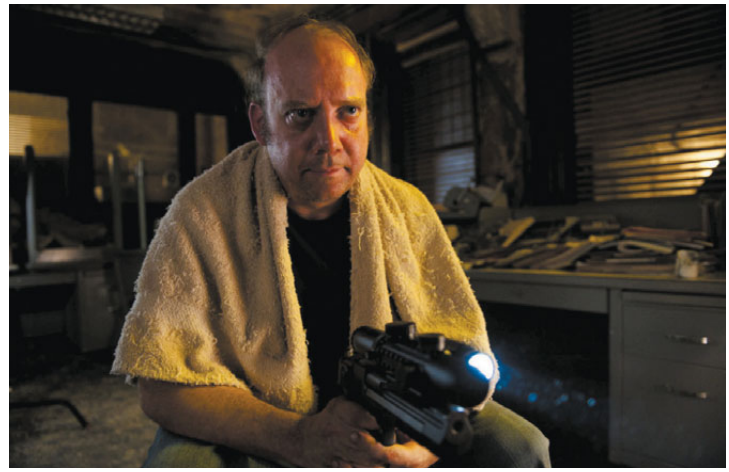
The car is Eric's coffin, Cronenberg says. "He's created this world, but he's also trapped. We looked at *Lebanon*, the movie that takes place entirely inside an Israeli tank, and we looked at *Das Boot*, which takes place entirely in a submarine. It's a protection, like a bomb shelter, but then you're trapped inside. He also talks about elevators a lot, and in the way this is his elevator also."

Add to this the limo's strange sonic ambience, excluding all traffic noise, all sense of the city (which intermittently bursts into earshot whenever a door opens and Eric steps outside). All that really exists in this hermetic cell is language – voices isolated in anechoic space. "My sound-effects guys were very worried," Cronenberg admits. "'Are you sure you don't want the sound of the wheels or the motors or the computers?' I said, 'No, he's trying to keep the sound of the outside world away, and now we're inside his head and there is no sound of the car, of the street. Yes, it will make it sound kind of dreamlike and surreal, but Eric wants that – he's created that.'"

Cronenberg often turns the outside world into an extension of the car's capsule. I wouldn't swear to it on one viewing, but it dawned on me that that Cronenberg was avoiding two-shots, in many scenes stressing shot/reverse shot as if Eric and his various interlocutors weren't really occupying the same space. It's only when he wants to stress the claustration that he gives us two-shots that stretch the point: when the manager (Gouchy Boy) of a recently deceased Sufi rapper enters the car, his mountainous body usurps Eric's throne, while Eric huddles in admiration, a courtier before his authoritative bulk.

This spatial cramping is especially acute in the sex scenes, which are comically over-physicalised. When we first see Eric and Didi, she's on his lap, they're humping; once they stop, they stay separate, and shots of Binoche writhing coquettishly around the car, as if in a post-coital fashion shoot, isolate her within its black leather interiors. It's as if she's in a cage, a trapped luxury acquisition. Later, Cronenberg uses claustrophobia and body language to brilliantly bizarre effect in the scene where Eric and Jane talk sex, but only mime it: she's sweaty in jogging gear, crushing a water bottle between her thighs, while a naked Eric leans towards her, talking as he undergoes his rectal examination. In one shot, his arm and torso arch over Jane like a wing, or a limb in a Francis Bacon painting. "How come we've never spent this kind of time together?" she asks, bringing home the absurdity of this parody of glamour sex.

Elsewhere a series of environments echo the car's isolation and enclosure. There's a nightclub scene in which Eric and a bodyguard watch a heaving crowd from a balcony; they're present yet not present, as if they've been digitally composited into the action. And the final scene is a 22-minute episode at Benno Levin's lair, which is where the travel ends and theatricality and stasis take hold absolutely. Benno's space is very like a stage set, cluttered with the detritus of 20th-century analogue culture: adding machines, filing cabinets, paper. It's a mesmerising finale, all the more so because the film's slow, inexorable roll has sud-

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS
Clockwise from top left: wife Elise (Sarah Gadon), Didi (Juliette Binoche), disgruntled employee Benno Levin (Paul Giamatti) and André Petrescu (Mathieu Amalric)

denly, irreversibly come to a dead stop. Even so, I have to confess I found the scene fascinating for the way it's staged and played out, while (as in the book) largely tuning out from the actual text of the encounter.

What's mesmerising about the film is not so much the subject as how Cronenberg executes it – how he personalises it. That's consistent with what he said in his press conference about keeping DeLillo's dialogue verbatim: "It's like doing a version of a Bob Dylan song. Everybody knows the words, but there's still creative scope – in the rhythm, the orchestration, what register you're playing in." For me, it's the register, the phrasing that makes the film, rather than its content – content that, as many reviewers of the book felt, can come across as forced and obvious (damningly, Michiko Kakutani of *The New York Times* called the novel "as lugubrious and heavy-handed as a bad Wim Wenders film").

So today's young financial princes live in their own hi-tech sarcophagi? So abstract financial algorithms are stifling the world, while numbing our consciousness to real economic suffering? Nothing revelatory there – but show us all that in the film's rarefied, knowingly airless style and you have something very distinctive. *Cosmopolis* is also rich because it's so redolent with echoes of other Cronenberg films. It's infused with a perverse numbness that most obviously recalls the director's other psycho-mobile nightmare *Crash* (1996), but its otherworldliness also takes us back to *eXistenZ* (1999). Here too people are ostensibly real, autonomous beings, but are also embodiments of principles and states: Eric Packer is a new avatar of *eXistenZ*'s computer-game designer Allegra Gellar, another creature of numbers (creator but also prisoner of her own digitally created hallucination). And *Cosmopolis* is an unlikely sequel to Cronenberg's last film, the Freud-Jung story *A Dangerous Method*: just look at all the couch-like surfaces in the car, and the number of 'analysts' (the word is loaded) who hold sessions with Eric.

Financial trauma

As DeLillo explained at the Cannes press conference, his 2003 novel was sparked by his noticing how many stretch limos there suddenly were on the New York streets: "Manhattan is the last place on earth where such automobiles can move comfortably. I began to get interested in this spectacle of enormous cars trying to turn corners and crushing traffic. I decided to place a character in one and go from there."

Later, I asked Cronenberg how the book had changed for him with time; in 2003 it was read as a post 9/11 novel, but we didn't yet know it was a pre-crash novel, although it clearly echoed events of financial trauma of the early years of the new millennium, notably the Enron scandal. How had the story's meaning changed since the financial cataclysm of 2008?

"It's interesting," Cronenberg says. "The only change I made was to change the Yen to the Yuan. In the book it's all about the Yen – since then, Japan has collapsed as a power, and it's obvious that China is where the future is in terms of financial strength. The Yuan is not yet a fully convertible currency so it couldn't be doing what in the movie we say it's doing. But by 2015, they say it will, and it'll probably displace the dollar as the universal currency. Other than that, we were never trying to make a movie of prophecy. This is an artistic creation with characters who are meant to be real people, not symbols of Wall Street or capitalism. You can't make a movie on the level of abstract concepts. You have to be very specific and real."

The film is immensely poised and elegant, with Cronenberg's regular DP Peter Suschitzky using the Alexa digital camera to produce a clear, textured image that's unusually tactile. Look at the scene in which Eric and Elise talk in a diner, individually leaning towards the camera in close-ups in such a way that they seem to loom out of the screen, virtually in 3D. Yet, given this hyper-polished styling, Cronenberg insists that the film's actual execution is decided on the spot rather than pre-planned.

"I don't rehearse with the actors, and I don't plan a lot. I don't like to come into a movie with an overall concept that I then impose on it. It's all spontaneous, and it comes out of the actual experience of making the movie. Of course Peter has to order his lights before we are shooting, and we say, 'OK, we have designed the limo – it comes ➡

apart in many ways. We have some sources of light inside the limo. How much does he need from outside?' These are all normal problems. But until we shoot the first shot, we don't know what we're going to do. You gradually feel the way."

Cronenberg's casting of Robert Pattinson as his lead is a strong, distinctive choice – and a smart one in that the actor's bankability has enabled the director to make a supremely offbeat art film. Pattinson is surprisingly good, far better than you'd imagine from his awkwardly wolfish turn in the recent period drama *Bel Ami*. It's a highly eccentric performance too, at first blankly arrogant, fitting Eric's sheened tailor's-dummy surface, but then more fragile. Pattinson fires off his telegraphic lines with increasing tetchiness, at one point rocking his head on a motionless body, like a nodding toy dog. At other times, he sounds as if he's repressing small-boy brattiness, on the edge of tears; and he has a great moment when, fired on by his would-be assassin, he sets off to meet him with a ridiculous, adolescent bring-it-on strut.

At the Cannes press conference, journalists were asked to refrain from questions about vampires. But inevitably, Cronenberg was asked whether he'd cast Pattinson because Eric is a financial bloodsucker. He was adamant that the actor's image had nothing to do with it: "It's easy to say that Eric Packer is a vampire, or a werewolf of Wall Street, but really that's superficial. You can't say to an actor, 'You are the symbol of capitalism.' Eric is a real person with a history and past, and the history is not *Twilight*, it is *Cosmopolis*."

SOMETHING OF THE NIGHT
The casting of Robert Pattinson, famous for the 'Twilight' movies, has been seen as a comment on the vampiric nature of capitalist high financiers

When I spoke to Cronenberg later, he talked about the casting in calmly pragmatic terms. He didn't praise Pattinson to the skies as the only possible Packer or the best actor of his generation. He simply explained how, if you're making an international co-production on a certain budget, and you have to juggle choices of British, Canadian and European actors (and since an early candidate, Colin Farrell, had fallen out of the frame) then you might end up with Pattinson as your lead. The heart of the question for Cronenberg was that he didn't think about any echoes of the actor's persona or previous work.

"I have to ignore the resonances. The past for Rob was always important insofar as it gave him fame and we could raise money on his name. End of story. Once we're shooting the movie, his movies are gone, my movies are gone. There's no other way to do it." Nor does he think about his own earlier films. "It's as if I've never made them – they're completely irrelevant. You're creating a new thing, and you have to forget all that other stuff, because it gives us nothing on the set."

'The characters are meant to be real people, not symbols of Wall Street or capitalism'

If you look to the film for statements about global economic collapse, the decline of the West, you may find it disappointing – as disappointing as many reviewers found DeLillo's book. Cronenberg's *Cosmopolis* undoubtedly reeks of zeitgeist, with its hero one of those infinitely powerful, infinitely wealthy child deities we're all used to reading about, like Mark Zuckerberg and the Google boys. And, like all zeitgeisty products, it runs the risk of losing its sheen fast in the face of accelerated historical, social, technological change – just as *eXistenZ*, brilliant as it is, quickly came to resemble a last-week dream of the future.

In fact the theme of the uncatchable Now and the crazed acceleration of time – measured no longer in perceivable present moments but in uncatchable zepto- and yoctoseconds – is a key theme of a book and film concerned with the condition of instantaneous obsolescence. In computerised modernity, Eric observes, the word 'computer' itself sounds archaic.

Who knows – *Cosmopolis* may have lost much of its currency or relevance next year, or next week, or by the time I've finished typing this sentence. But for now it's utterly alluring – the sleekest, shiniest, most unearthly vehicle on display in this year's Cannes.

'Cosmopolis' is released on 15 June, and is reviewed on page 55

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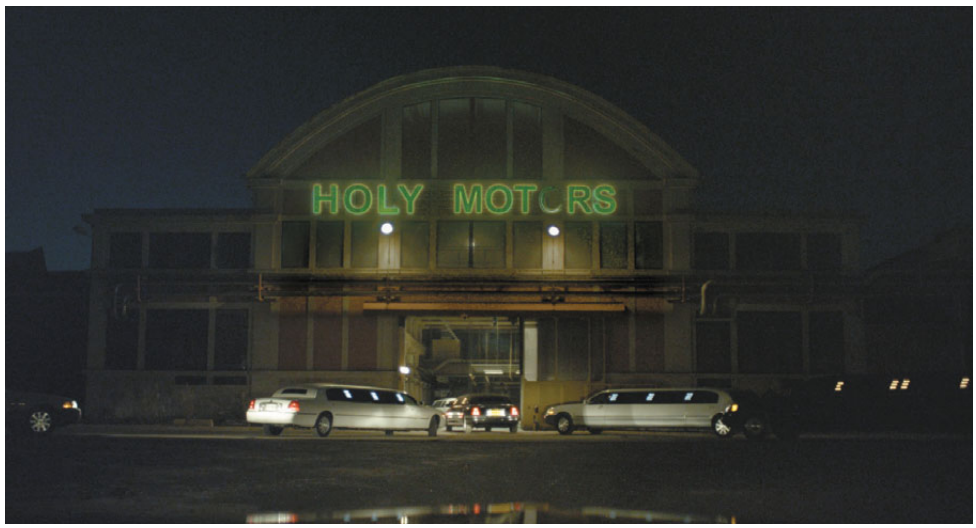
Despite a veritable cavalcade of car, road and even caravan movies, this year's Cannes seemed to be stuck in neutral, found **Nick James** *and, overleaf,* **Geoff Andrew**

CRUISE CONTROL



THE SECRET LIFE OF LIMOUSINES
Edith Scob, below, dons her 'Eyes Without a Face' mask in Leos Carax's 'Holy Motors'

To catch the mood of Cannes 2012, you had to be in the *Cosmopolis* press screening when Robert Pattinson's character Eric Packer says, "I want to know where all the limousines go at night." Nervous chuckles fluttered through the stalls. Partly this was because we had seen where the stretch limos go a couple of days earlier in Leos Carax's **Holy Motors** – to a parking lot where they indulge in *Cars*-style bedtime chatter with tail-lights flashing. But it was also because we were almost at the end of the festival and by then, anticipation of Cronenberg's film had been worn down by a succession of competition films that fell short of high expectations.

Rather than the customary boos or cheers, a wan silence met the credits of many a film. Cronenberg's film, for instance, transfixed rather than thrilled (see my review of it on p.55, and our cover feature on p.14) and was answered mostly by a blankness to match that of its super-rich thrill-seeker subject. By contrast, *Holy Motors* won a rare press ovation, so you might say that Carax – whose film was easily the freshest on view – upstaged Cronenberg. Had *Cosmopolis* played first, it could have been the other way round.

The notoriously arrogant Carax has long seemed more like the trace memory of a great director than the real thing, so it was a pleasant surprise to see him shine again. His three landmark films *Boy Meets Girl* (1984), *The Night Is Young* (*Mauvais Sang*, 1986) and *Les Amants du Pont-Neuf* (1991) promised much, but since then we've had only the audience-repelling incest tale *Pola X* (1999) and a couple of portmanteau package shorts, including 'Monsieur Merde' in *Tokyo!* (2008). Carax himself appears at the beginning of *Holy Motors* as a dreamer who finds a hidden door in his surreal bedroom that leads to a stage. Taking its cue from God's statement to the protagonist of Borges's tale 'Everything and Nothing' – "Among the forms in my dreams are you, who like myself are many and no one" – the film thereafter tracks Monsieur Oscar (Denis Lavant). At first he seems to be a rich banker given to being driven around in a stretch limo by the uniformed Céline (Edith Scob) and playacting other lives. Soon we realise, however, that the banker is just another of the roles this 'actor' plays.

The minute Brad Pitt, as breezy hitman Jackie Cogan, gets into the car, the film snaps into focus

AT CLOSE QUARTERS
From the top: Brad Pitt in 'Killing Them Softly'; Sam Riley, Kristen Stewart and Garrett Hedlund in 'On the Road'; Bertolucci's 'Me and You'

As Lavant becomes, in turn, a beggarwoman, a motion-capture actor in an erotic CGI fantasy, the goblin-like Monsieur Merde (reprised from the short) at a fashion shoot, the protective father of a teenage girl, a player in an accordion band, a dying old man and the former lover of Kylie Minogue's regretful Eva, Carax adopts a swathe of imaginative approaches. *Holy Motors* feels like the work of a director venting his frustration over many failed projects by pouring a job lot of his ideas into one mould. What makes it dazzle, despite two or three shaky passages (Monsieur Merde kidnapping Eva Mendes being the most dire) is the relaxed *élan* with which it literally motors through its game of tragic charades.

The theatrical elements of cinema's history that haunt *Holy Motors* also inform Alain Resnais's *You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet!* – perhaps the 90-year-old director's way of saying "I'm not dead yet" (see sidebar, p.24). It's a self-aggrandising recapitulation not only of Resnais's own works but also of classic scenarios from the French cinema of his youth. This career-summary aspect is also present in Bernardo Bertolucci's underrated adaptation of Niccolò Ammaniti's novel **Me and You** (*Io e te*), a modest Rome-set two-hander that played out of competition. A teenager (Malcolm McDowell lookalike Jacopo Olmo Antinori) arranges to spend the two weeks he's meant to be on a school skiing trip hiding out in the basement of the building he lives in with his mother, only to find it invaded by his 25-year-old junkie half-sister (actress-photographer Tea Falco). The now wheelchair-bound director says he wanted to make a film about claustrophilia – a love of confinement and controlled inner spaces – and he succeeds with characteristic flair as he explores themes that have fascinated him throughout his career: youth on the cusp of possibility, life as a dressing-up box, the consequences of love and other dangerous pleasures.

But if these theatre-inspired films by Resnais and Bertolucci were at least diverting, the films in competition that drew on the American crime and road-movie genres were mostly deflating. There's no question that **Lawless**, John Hillcoat's Prohibition tale of a seemingly invulnerable family of Virginia moonshine runners, can be enjoyed as a TV movie – it is, after all, a

EASTWARD HO
Abbas Kiarostami's 'Like Someone in Love' (far left) looks at prostitution in Tokyo, while Apichatpong Weerasethakul's 'Mekong Hotel' (left) deals with ghosts in Thailand

studied succession of well-worn clichés. But despite a script and score by Nick Cave, what's conspicuously missing are the poetic qualities you might find in the likes of Robert Mitchum's *Thunder Road* (1958), or even the Roger Corman 1930s-set gangster films.

Walter Salles's adaptation of Jack Kerouac's **On the Road** dulls in a different way. It may simply be an unfilmable book – it is, after all, about the writing down of impressionistic experiences, with essentially passive narrator Sal Paradise (played with huge passivity by Sam Riley) focusing on sex-and-benzedrine action man Dean Moriarty (Garrett Hedlund, who should be charismatic but isn't much more here than a flashing grin). Two or three nice moments made it worth seeing: the 1948 car raising dust along straight roads, against different vistas; Hedlund dancing like Jagger on speed in an implausibly conceived Mexican club; and Kristen Stewart sitting in the back of the car with one leg up and the evening sun on her face, looking as enigmatic as you could wish for.

At first Andrew Dominik's **Killing Them Softly** looked like it would drain energy just as fast. Adapted from George V. Higgins's talk-driven 1974 novel *Cogan's Trade*, the updated film begins uncertainly during the 2008 US presidential-election campaign with two losers (Scoot McNairy and Ben Mendelsohn) discussing a potential robbery. A poker game for mafia types run by Markie Trattman (Ray Liotta) got knocked over once and several years later Trattman, sure that nobody cared anymore, admitted that he did it himself. If the losers hit the game, they reason, Trattman will be blamed. The opening scenes are clunky and unconvincing, as are the televisions everywhere that seem to be locked on Obama giving speeches. But the raid on the game is tense, and the minute Brad Pitt, as breezy hitman Jackie Cogan, gets into the car of the company man (Richard Jenkins) who wants the perpetrators dealt with, the film snaps into focus. Dominik reaches for a grunge-*noir* mood and authentic performances, and largely gets them – not least from James Gandolfini as a gone-to-seed hitman with gargantuan appetites and a hair-trigger temper. That said, *Killing Them Softly* isn't in the same class as that classic Higgins adaptation *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* (1973).

By contrast, it would be hard to imagine a crime movie more sloppy and clueless than Lee Daniels's **The Paperboy**. Ludicrous scene upon scene piles up in a way that only Pedro Almodóvar (originally mooted for the project) might have pulled off, whether it's Nicole Kidman miming a blowjob for prison hard man John Cusack or pissing on Zac Efron's multiple jellyfish stings. The Florida-set Pete Dexter source novel – about getting the psychopathic but wrongly accused Cusack out of jail – is subsumed here into the matter of former swimming champion Efron lusting after Kidman. Confusion is deepened by occasional narration from Macy Gray, playing Efron's father's housekeeper, who wasn't even present at most of the events she describes. It's an all-round embarrassment, and as they posed for the photographers, the cast looked shell-shocked by the bad reviews.

For genuine invention from the Southern US, you'd have been better off seeking out **Beasts of the Southern Wild**, which won the Camera d'Or for director Benh Zeitlin. It's a vivid, impressionistic film about Hushpuppy, a self-determined eight-year-old black girl growing up cheek by jowl with wildlife among the hard-drinking, half-deranged inhabitants of an (imaginary?) island off the coast of New Orleans. When the infamous hurricane comes, the island is inundated with salt water, and the authorities insist that all the inhabitants must be evacuated. The only thing that can save the community is the destruction of a levee protecting an industrial plant. At root this is a simple piratical parable about survival, depicted with a child's eye for wonder. It has a superb sense of imagery and rhythm – and in Quvenzhané Wallis, a formidable child actress.

Charm comes easily also to Korean director Hong Sangsoo – perhaps too easily. Since he's discovered the joys of improvisation he's been turning out films at high speed: *Like You Know It All* (2009), *Hahaha* (2010), *Oki's Movie* (2010), *The Day He Arrives* (2011) and now **In Another Country** *(Da-reun na-ra-e-suh)*. Each has a semi-autobiographical slant, and usually the stories revolve around adultery. What Korean men are like and how dangerous it is for women to be around them provide the humorous themes for Sangsoo's latest, a series of three scenarios that – in a narrative gambit typical of this director – have supposedly been written by a woman film student (to help her calm down). Each is about a different foreign woman called Anne who visits the seaside town of Mohang, where she encounters filmmaker lovers, a bodyguard on the beach and the helpful female hotel manager. Isabelle Huppert plays all the women and each discrete story has its moments of well-observed, gentle *politesse*. I can't help feeling, however, that Sangsoo is not as focused as he might be on the underlying moral questions he plays with. His films are now almost negligibly light.

That same accusation was made by some against Abbas Kiarostami's **Like Someone in Love**, a Tokyo brief encounter between part-time call-girl Akiko (Takanashi Rin), her elderly client Takashi (Okuno Tadashi) and the insanely jealous Noriaki (Kase Ryo), who believes he's Akiko's boyfriend. Many groaned at the corny old man/young girl premise, and some were sniffy about the Iranian director shooting a film in Japan. Since this jumps into its delicately played story when it's already underway, and out again before there's any narrative conclusion, it couldn't but register as a slender work, especially since the critics were wet through from being made to wait 20 minutes in a torrential downpour. I want to see it again in better circumstances.

Also rather too oblique for Cannes's scramble was Apichatpong Weerasethakul's **Mekong Hotel**, the first manifestation of a much larger project. A terrace that overlooks the swollen Mekong river where it divides north-eastern Thailand from Laos is the film's central location. But before we see it, the director interviews on camera the classical-guitar teacher who plays live throughout. Then, in a room and on the terrace (there may be more than one terrace), rehearsals for an unrealised film called *Ecstasy Garden* take place. It's about a mother-and-daughter pair of vampiric ghosts (specifically 'Pob' ghosts, a particular north-east Thai variety) who feed on human flesh, and about the daughter's haunting of her lover through eternity. These scenes are intermingled with actress Jenjira Pongpas's real-life recollections, talk of the floods, and political matters. The film ends with a lengthy twilight longshot of minuscule jet-ski riders looking like ➡

insects skimming the surface of the water.

As all these lighter films demonstrate, the subjects of love and travel continued to dangle themselves before journalists in a holiday location cursed with bad weather. Of course, Michael Haneke's *Amour*, the worthy Palme d'Or winner, was instead about staying at home to the bitter end. I've written about *Amour* elsewhere (see Festivals blog at www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/) and Geoff Andrew also covers it in his sidebar (right). I mention it now only to note that its sensitive portraiture finds its exact opposite in fellow Austrian Ulrich Seidl's **Paradise: Love** *(Paradies: Liebe)*, an excoriating depiction of sex tourism in Nigeria that's marred by a relentlessness designed to pound the squeamish. It would be hard to imagine a more lucid vision of a pushy 50-year-old Austrian woman's exploration of sex with local 'beach boys' in and around a rich hotel complex. Her gradual accommodation of economic and moral compromises is matched by ever more garish interiors that shriek plastic 'happiness'. Each scene is gruelling in its insistence that you watch despite your desire to make it stop. But I baulked more insistently at the cruel humour with which the film mocks and humiliates these unlovely people and their desperate entertainers (all brilliantly incarnated by a game cast).

A less alienating sense of black humour is employed by rising British director Ben Wheatley (*Down Terrace*, *Kill List*) in **Sightseers**, a wry and lovingly constructed tale about Tina (Alice Lowe) and Chris (Steve Oram), a nerdish couple from the Midlands. Chris wants to rescue Tina from her fake-bedridden mother and take her on a romantic caravan holiday. To have a rough idea of what *Sightseers* is like, anyone familiar with Mike Leigh's 1975 TV play *Nuts in May* need only imagine Leigh's two characters allowing their inner rage to get out of control. But the painfully acute Tina and Chris characters were actually created and developed by Lowe and Oram in their stand-up act over several years. The tone for the rest of the film is set when the infuriated Chris witnesses a slob deliberately litter a theme park dedicated to trams – and reverses the caravan over him. You could say Wheatley's film is all about what Bob Dylan called "a pettiness that plays so rough", but it's much funnier and more acute than that makes it sound.

Coming after such a golden pair as *A Prophet* and *The Beat That My Heart Skipped*, Jacques Audiard's **Rust and Bone** *(De rouille et d'os)* was always likely to suffer by comparison. A romance between the gorgeous Stéphanie (Marion Cotillard), a trainer at a marina who loses her legs to a killer whale, and kind but non-committal street boxer Ali (Mattias Schoenaerts), who's 'open' to sex but oblivious to much else, it feels rather contrived – though it's refreshing to see such full-on frankness in showing what it's like to live with one's lower legs missing (the stumps of Stéphanie's legs are almost flaunted). Audiard is unashamed, too, about exploiting the contrasting sexual allure of his leads. If the film doesn't quite convince, the moment when the whale attacks is a brutal shock – and perhaps the best piece of pure cinema at Cannes shows Stéphanie returning to the marina on her prosthetic legs to conduct the

AND NOW THE END IS NEAR

Michael Haneke's deserving Palme d'Or-winner 'Amour' was just one of three movies at Cannes this year – alongside new works by veteran Alain Resnais and newcomer Michel Franco – to take a long, hard look at death. **Geoff Andrew** *pays his respects*

'AMOUR' Emmanuelle Riva as Anne in Michael Haneke's moving Palme d'Or-winner

Death is almost as ubiquitous in the cinema as it is in reality, so it's unsurprising that it figured frequently in Cannes, its presence felt in works as diverse as *Cosmopolis* and *Killing Them Softly*, *Beyond the Hills* and *In the Fog*. But as usual it was mostly deployed as a plot device to arouse specific emotions in the viewer; very few of the festival's films had death and our response to it as their central theme. Happily, three that did were among the finest on show – and one of them deservingly won the Palme d'Or.

Rightly, Michael Haneke's **Amour** *(Love)* was widely praised for its characteristically honest and unsentimental depiction of an otherwise comfortably-off octogenarian couple (Jean-Louis Trintignant and Emmanuelle Riva) trying to cope when the wife suffers strokes that leave her first partly paralysed, then virtually speechless and inactive. Haneke's account of this horribly common situation is simplicity itself: save for an early scene in which Georges and Anne – retired music teachers – go to a piano recital, the entire film takes place at their Paris apartment and follows a linear chronology interrupted only by two brief dream sequences reflecting Georges's anxieties. As Anne's ability to deal with her surroundings diminishes, so the couple's world shrinks; visits by their daughter (Isabelle Huppert), her partner, a former student and even the care workers become increasingly unwelcome, an irritating distraction from the business at hand.

And that business, for Georges (since it's he who must now take the most active role), is a matter of deciding what's best for Anne and of sustaining and showing his love for her, even as she loses both her will to live and many of the characteristics that defined her over the decades of their marriage. Haneke never underplays the difficulty of maintaining a mutually supportive relationship when everything's turned for the worse and even one's beloved Schubert offers no solace; nor is his film remotely sensationalist – as ever, he's acutely alert to what needs to be shown, and what can be left to the imagination. The result is an admirably forthright, unsentimental yet sensitive examination of the challenges posed by the sudden, painful and inexorable erosion of an individual who's been central to one's experience of life; the film's unassertive tenderness and two brave, quite brilliant performances make it extraordinarily moving.

Also rather affecting, given its director's own 90 years, is Alain Resnais's **You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet!** *(Vous n'avez encore rien vu)*, a meditation on human mortality which one Cannes attendee likened – not without justification – to Altman's *A Prairie Home Companion*. Here, too, ruminations on death are filtered through performance – not,

The film's unassertive tenderness and two brave, brilliant performances make it extraordinarily moving

this time, a live radio show but a staging (or, to be more accurate, stagings) of an adaptation of Jean Anouilh's play *Eurydice*. A host of mostly well-known French thesps playing themselves (not just Resnais regulars Sabine Azéma, Pierre Arditi and Lambert Wilson but Michel Piccoli, Mathieu Amalric, Anne Consigny et al) are invited to a memorial tribute in the mansion of their friend Antoine d'Anthac (Denis Podalydès), who's left them a video documenting a young company's rehearsal of his play *Eurydice*. As they watch it, the mourners (who have all at some point in their careers appeared in the play) start first to join in with the dialogue, then to act out their remembered roles, both with one another and with the performers on the video screen before them. And as the play proceeds, so the mansion turns, now and again, into a stage or movie set.

Though Anouilh's play, written during and probably about the Nazi occupation of France, may feel dated, some of its ideas about life and death still resonate, particularly with regard to the role played by memory – an abiding Resnais concern, of course. And he makes imaginative use of this aspect of Alex Reval and Laurent Herbiet's screenplay; as the film/play switches both between the different performers (there are three Orpheuses and three Eurydices) and between various levels of performance, he creates a witty, playful confection that pays tribute to how reality may be enhanced, enlarged, even extended by art and artifice. Film, it's often said, confers a kind of immortality; and if, as one of Anouilh's characters suggests, death is a friend who takes us away from the pain of living, might not the same perhaps be said of theatre and the cinema itself?

A rather darker response to death inflected **After Lucia** *(Después de Lucia)*, the second feature by Mexico's Michel Franco, which deservedly won the Un Certain Regard prize. Lucia herself doesn't appear in the movie; instead we see her husband and daughter trying to reboot their lives by moving to Mexico City after her sudden demise in an accident. Death, in other words, is a constant if invisible companion for them, shaping both the widower's efforts to make a go of his restaurant and the teenager's response to being bullied ever more viciously by her schoolmates. It's a tough, unsettling film; the later scenes might feel implausible were it not for the fact that extreme and extremely unlikely things do occur every day. And if, as here, the unexpected death of an intimate knocks one flat, it's possible totally to lose one's bearings. Therein lie both the dramatic flair and the terrible wisdom of Franco's film; he's a talent to watch.

■ *'Amour' is released on 16 November*

'YOU AIN'T SEEN NOTHIN' YET!' Lambert Wilson, Anne Consigny, Mathieu Amalric, Sabine Azéma and Pierre Arditi

'AFTER LUCIA' A daughter copes with her mother's death in Michel Franco's deserving Un Certain Regard-winner

SURVIVORS
Mattias Schoenaerts and Marion Cotillard in 'Rust and Bone', right; Mads Mikkelsen, named Best Actor for 'The Hunt', far right

movements of the killer whale behind glass.

Matteo Garrone's **Reality** is equally ambitious in scope, but less successful. This year's Cannes boasted more terrific performances in so-so films than I can remember, and Aniello Arena's portrait of extrovert Neapolitan fishmonger Luciano was among the best. Luciano is his local community's natural entertainer – he'll even drag up – and his family push him to audition for Italian *Big Brother*. Soon he becomes convinced that he's being tested by spies in Naples to see if he's worthy of being chosen. All this is played for its exposure of the way the lure of success keeps people in their place, but there's a point at which Luciano starts to give away everything to the poor that suggests a more fruitful avenue the film could have gone down. Suppose Luciano had become completely Christ-like in his endeavour to be picked? Instead of which he disappears into his own fantasy.

The opening scene of Carlos Reygadas's **Post Tenebras Lux** is alarming for a city dweller like myself. A tiny girl toddler (played by Reygadas's daughter Rut) pads about in a huge muddy soccer pitch with long-horn cattle and a pack of powerful dogs. You feel her vulnerability deeply. She's the daughter of Juan (Adolfo Jimenez Castro), who has moved with his wife Natalia (Nathalia Acevedo) from the city to the deep countryside. From this point on I'm much less certain what I'm describing, because this is truly an avant-garde film rather than a plausible 'feature film'. The next scene shows a devil-shaped red glow that seems akin to Apichatpong's monkey ghosts in *Uncle Boonmee*. Indeed, much of the invention in this scatter-structured film seems to derive from small tributes to Reygadas's contemporaries: Lisandro Alonso's meditative quotidian gaze seems to inspire several scenes; the use of a special image-distorting lens is reminiscent of Sokurov; while a scene where the couple attend a club orgy room could have come out of a Catherine Breillat film. The visceral moments include Juan's savage beating of dog, and a murder perpetrated by 'Seven', the house servant (Willebaldo Torres). But for a better – indeed any – understanding of how it all fits together, I need to see it again.

For me the best films in Cannes after Haneke's were solid rather than spectacular. Thomas Vinterberg's **The Hunt** *(Jagten)*, for instance, is just the coherent, well-structured drama many have longed to see from this director since his breakthrough 1998 film *Festen*. Mads Mikkelsen won the Best Actor prize for his portrayal of Lucas, a kindergarten teacher who's accused of sexual abuse by his best friend's daughter. She's making it up, but is immediately believed by everyone in the small community. Soon all the other kids are pressed into confessions of their own. The film is a sharp portrait of the slippery ambiguity with which myth takes hold, and in that sense bears a superficial resemblance to Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. Its queasy intimacy keeps the tension high as Lucas, already in the midst of a painful divorce, finds everyone turning against him except for the local hunt master – a figure whom Vinterberg frames suspiciously, as if we should suspect he's a real paedophile. *The Hunt* is an effectively creepy exposé of a very modern problem.

Superstition and myth also haunt Cristian Mungiu's **Beyond the Hills** *(Dupã dealuri)*. Like his 2007 Palme d'Or winner *4 Months, 3 Weeks & 2 Days*, the film focuses on two young women in a dilemma with authority, only this time the authority is the Romanian orthodox church and, by extension, the Creator himself. Voichita (Cosmina Stratan) has become a nun serving a hilltop church community. Her former orphanage friend Alina (Cristina Flutur) turns up from Germany to declare her love for Voichita and get her to come back. Voichita strives instead to turn Alina's love towards God, but the community becomes convinced that Alina is possessed, and so a process of exorcism begins. The increments with which the screws of tragedy turn are finely calibrated. In fact Mungiu's film would have been near perfect if not for some slightly mood-breaking minor performances and one too many scenes in which a nun runs in because Alina's flipped again! The two leads – one all knowing looks and disquiet, the other electric with emotion – thoroughly deserved their shared Best Actress prize.

Thomas Vinterberg's 'The Hunt' is a sharp portrait of the slippery ambiguity with which myth takes hold

In the Fog *(V tumane)* doesn't bear much resemblance to *My Joy*, the work that established director Sergei Loznitsa on the festival circuit. The setting is the Belarus forest in 1942, well behind the German lines. Three men are marched to be hanged by pro-Nazi interior Kommando troops for sabotaging a train, but a fourth, Sushenya (Vladimir Svirski), is released. Clearly he must be the informer – or is that how the local Nazi commander (Vlad Ivanov) wants him to be perceived? When the partisans send a two-man revenge execution squad to collect him, Sushenya is stoical. He's been expecting them, but he insists he is innocent. When they take him out into the vast forest at night, what unfolds very slowly is a rigorous drama of fateful small decisions, each one having consequences that reduce the horizon of possibility. The forest scenes, shot by Oleg Mutu with an exquisite eye for atmosphere, are magnificently evocative, and there's a strong feeling of authenticity to this defined world that's rare in World War II films. I loved every one of its 73 shots.

If I say that being in Cannes this year felt more like being in Berlin, I wouldn't be talking about the rain – more about the tenuous nature of the films in competition. Given the disadvantage that the German festival has – with Cannes breathing down its neck – one should congratulate them in retrospect for getting films as strong as almost any here: *Tabu*, *Caesar Must Die* etc. And since producers of auteur films now find it increasingly difficult to distribute them widely, or to make much money back on them, you have to wonder if the major festivals could be looking beyond the usual suspects in search of the sort of films that really demand to be seen. Certainly the alternative strategy of bringing in more big American productions hasn't worked.

■ *'Lawless' is released on 7 September, 'Killing Them Softly' and 'On the Road' on 21 September, 'Holy Motors' on 28 September, 'Beasts of the Southern Wild' on 19 October, 'Amour' ('Love') on 16 November and 'Sightseers' on 30 November*

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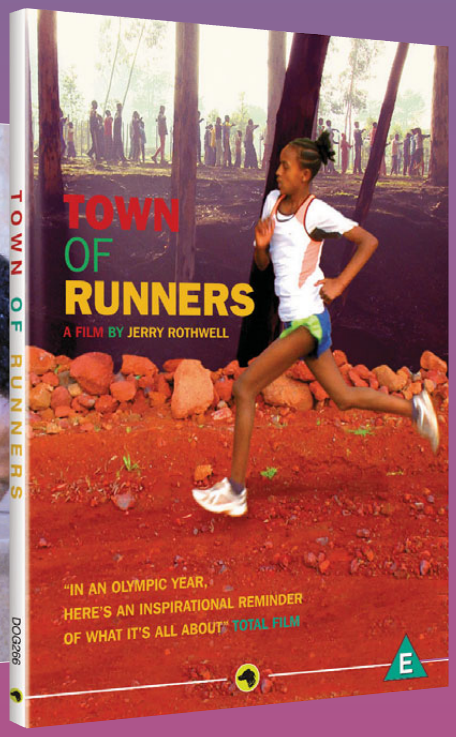

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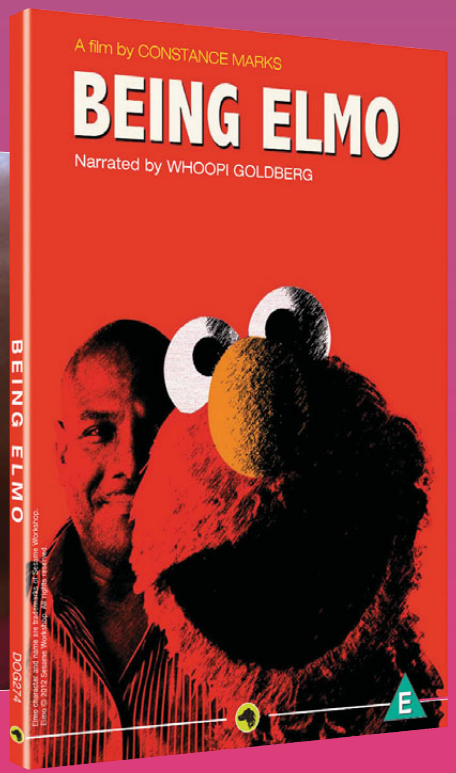

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Whether or not it's officially billed as a prequel to 'Alien', Ridley Scott's 'Prometheus' is bound to be judged in the light of it. **Kim Newman** *unravels the connections*

PROMETHEUS UNBOUND

IN WHICH WE SERVE The crew of the Prometheus, above, includes Dr Elizabeth Shaw (Noomi Rapace, right) and robot David (Michael Fassbender, opposite)

Alien (1979) may be celebrated as a Ridley Scott film, but it had many creators. Screenwriters Dan O'Bannon and Ron Shusett originally thought that, in the wake of *Star Wars*, they could sell Roger Corman a script called *Star Beast*, a gloss on a couple of well-remembered quickies: Edward L. Cahn's *It! The Terror from Beyond Space* (1958), a monster movie about a stowaway vampire creature picking off the crew of a spaceship en route from Venus to Earth, and Mario Bava's *Planet of the Vampires* (*Terrore nello spazio*, 1965), a 'shaggy God' story about astronauts exploring a fog-bound world where they find a crashed alien spaceship and its skeletal pilot – and eventually become the ancestors of humanity.

Some similarities between the *Star Beast* script and sections of A.E. Van Vogt's 1950 novel *The Voyage of the Space Beagle* (a title that resonates even more with the purpose of the good ship Prometheus in Scott's new film) led to an out-of-court settlement in Van Vogt's favour – though it seems that O'Bannon and Shusett had in fact drawn on a clutch of sources in an attempt to create an archetypal horror-in-space picture, rather than simply poaching from Van Vogt. After all, they must also have seen various episodes of *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* or *Star Trek* in which sundry monsters get aboard the submarine or the spaceship and slaughter lower-billed characters before being defeated by the stars.

It's unlikely that the screenwriters were as familiar with *Doctor Who* as Ridley Scott, who was originally set to design that show's second series but had to drop out (and thus missed the chance to create the Daleks, a job that earned pop-culture immortality for Raymond Cusick). But the life-cycle of the Alien organism has parallels with the Wirrn, the parasitic giant wasps that incubate in cryo-frozen humans in the 1975 Doctor Who serial *The Ark in Space*. As a franchise, *Alien* is as enamoured of chases through spaceship corridors as the BBC's flagship sci-fi horror show, and fans can list other points of similarity. (And here are two: it's certainly odd that Dr Elizabeth Shaw, the Noomi Rapace character in *Prometheus*, has the same name as the assistant, played by Caroline John, who co-starred with Jon Pertwee in his first season as the Doctor. 1997's *Alien Resurrection*, meanwhile, revealed the humanoid robots who feature throughout the series like to call themselves "autons" – just like the animated shop-window dummies featured in *Spearhead from Space*, the 1970 serial that introduced Pertwee and John.)

The structure of *Alien* has prompted many readings of the film that note its parallels with the 'body count' slasher films initiated by *Halloween* (1978), and it's often been referred to as 'a haunted house movie in space'. However, as James Cameron's sequel *Aliens* (1986) underlined, the format is older and more versatile. The plot about the unit separated from a home base – picked off one by one by a mostly unseen enemy and riven by tensions within the group that make one or more of the men as much a danger as the external opponent – goes back to Philip MacDonald's 1927 novel *Patrol*, set in Mesopotamia (yes, modern-day Iraq) during World War I and drawn from the author's personal experiences. The book was filmed as a 1929 silent and a 1934 John Ford ➡

talkie under the title *The Lost Patrol*, and has been remade ever since – officially and unofficially – as a variety of western, war, action, adventure, jungle, horror and science-fiction picture.

If variations on this one story have a genre tag, we should call them 'lost patrol' films. John McTiernan's *Predator* (1987), for instance, is an *Alien* imitation that's even more obviously fitted over the grid of MacDonald's plot. No wonder that film spawned a franchise which wound up intertwining with the *Alien* films – though *Prometheus* huffily renders Paul W.S. Anderson's *AVP Alien vs. Predator* (2004) and related films uncanonical by contradicting their version of the origins of the Alien species. In fact it's possible that *Prometheus* even contradicts *Aliens*, *Alien*[3] (1992) and *Alien Resurrection* too, which lumps it in a little sub-category of sci-fi reboot/remake/prequels that includes *Star Wars Episode I The Phantom Menace*, *Star Trek*, *The Thing* (2011) and *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*.

Like all those films, *Prometheus* is as much fan fiction as it is a re-adaptation of original material. It's weirdly concerned with filling in gaps and answering long-standing mysteries that might have formed the topic of pub conversations after viewings of the previous films but which, in the context of the drama, are as irrelevant and to-be-skimmed-over as the 'great whatsits' of thrillers that Hitchcock called macguffins. When asked after *Alien* what he would like to explore in a sequel, Scott picked on the so-called 'Space Jockey' – the dead giant humanoid alien pilot with a burst chest found in the crashed spaceship along with the alien eggs – and said he'd like to know where he came from. (Well, if he'd asked the screenwriters, they could have told him that the alien pilot came from a Mario Bava film.) In *Alien*, we're to assume that this whole story has happened before to the Space Jockey's people, just as the 1982 *The Thing* plays a joke on its status as a remake by implying that what happens to the American Antarctic base has already played out at the Norwegian facility (prompting last year's redundant remake-cum-prequel).

Unanswered questions

Outside the world of animation, cinema still isn't ready for a movie in which the lead characters are all inhuman aliens, so *Prometheus* isn't about what happened on that crashed ship. Instead it's about an Earth expedition that happens on the site before the events of *Alien* and finds out what happened. Or not.

Today's fans can debate, thanks to inconsistencies left in between drafts, whether or not the Space Jockey of *Prometheus* is the same one the Nostromo found in *Alien*. If not, there's an awfully big coincidence out there; if so, then the continuities don't quite match up. J.J. Abrams's 2009 *Star Trek* rewrote the space-time continuum, wiping out all previous versions of the series, to answer any niggles. But Scott (who in the meantime has been hemming about whether Deckard is a replicant or not on the strength of a line about the number of rogue androids on the loose in *Blade Runner*, which was left in after a character was cut from the script) seems to be less fussy about details here. So *Prometheus* answers FAQs about *Alien* while raising new queries that can more usefully be explored in IMDb comment threads than in any further sequels.

Concerned with filling in gaps, 'Prometheus' is as much fan fiction as it is a re-adaptation of original material

Here are some to be going on with. Q: Why does Ellie Shaw (whose questing in space for answers to big religious questions that also relate to her dead father echoes another Ellie, the Jodie Foster heroine of 1997's *Contact*) at one point say "Caesarean" when she plainly means "abortion"? A: So as not to offend pro-lifers, even as the film's theories about the alien seeding of life on Earth write the Bible and Darwin off the books. Q: Who drives the truck back to the ship when the storm strikes, stranding doomed characters in the pyramid, and why aren't they in trouble for it? A: Could it be that even the mission controllers don't expect 'red-shirts' played by Rafe Spall and Sean Harris to make it home safe? Q: Is the mummy-look aged Australian trillionaire Peter Weyland (Guy Pearce) of this Fox franchise, locked in a struggle to attain immortality at the expense of would-be corporate successors, some sort of avatar of Rupert Murdoch...?

But an even bigger question is this: what was it humanity did over 2,000 years ago to persuade the bald, muscular giants who created us that we needed to be wiped out – but not to the degree that they send out a second kill-ship when the first crashes? Ellie and the film are insistent on asking this question, but resist the interesting answer – that humanity is such a threat to the universe that we need to be rendered extinct (the same way Ripley obsessively tries to wipe out the last of the xenomorphs in three earlier sequels). When the Space Jockey, whose job was to erase pre-industrial, earthbound human civilisations

INTO THE UNKNOWN
From far left: Charlize Theron as company rep Meredith Vickers; in the alien spaceship; Idris Elba as Janek, captain of the Prometheus

whose greatest achievement was pyramid-building, wakes from cryo-sleep surrounded by men and women in spacesuits who have left their planet and crossed the universe to find him, he is simply a brutal baddie who wants to kill. But is he terrified to find himself suddenly surrounded by such clever little monsters?

Masterpiece by committee

Back in the 1970s, Roger Corman would happily have made *Star Beast* (and part of me wonders if it might not have been a minor classic in its own right). Later, in fact, he did produce several of the many *Alien* imitations: *Humanoids from the Deep*, *Galaxy of Terror* and *Forbidden World* – quickies on which the young James Cameron worked before moving up to *The Terminator* and then *Aliens*.

Instead, O'Bannon and Shusett's script was passed along the Hollywood chain of command, purely on the strength of the facehugger/chestburster concept, and benefited from a tough, gritty rewrite by producers Walter Hill and David Giler (who remain credited on *Prometheus* but are long gone from the show). As a director, Hill specialised in 'Lost Patrol' films (*The Warriors*, *Southern Comfort*, *Streets of Fire*, *Extreme Prejudice* and *Trespass* are all variants), but he didn't feel confident with sci-fi. He cast around for a newcomer with something to prove, landing Scott just after his impressive if minimally commercial first feature *The Duellists* (1977). Set during the Napoleonic War, that film was an adaptation of a Joseph Conrad short story – an inspiration that Scott carried over into *Alien* by naming the spaceships after two of the great writer's works: the Nostromo and the Narcissus (as in Conrad's novella *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*).

A more significant Scott contribution, however, was to bring onboard the other great creator of the *Alien* universe by hiring the Swiss surrealist H.R. Giger to design the xenomorph (the name, incidentally, comes from *It Came from Outer Space*, 1953). This added to the monster's aesthetic an element of biomechanics, a sinuously sexual subtext and a Lovecraftian vision – all of which are overwritten in *Prometheus* by notions of ancient alien genetic engineering of humanity that have more to do with *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Quatermass and the Pit*, *Contact* and Erich von Däniken. Compare the Giger jumble of sex organs and insect parts of the *Alien* eggs and creatures with the simple canisters, manta-snake and rapist octopus of *Prometheus*, and there's a sense of devolution – a missing streak of insanity that this movie really needed.

Alien was one of those masterpiece-by-committee films, fathered by writers, producers, designers and cast as well as director (and it's probably Scott's only film as a director for hire). The subsequent development of the series, even in its despised entries, has taken a similarly wayward path, with Hill and Giler calling in talents as diverse as Cameron, William Gibson and Vincent Ward (both of whom worked on early visions of *Alien*[3]), David Fincher (that film's eventual director), Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Joss Whedon (director and writer respectively of *Alien Resurrection*) to add in elements to the universe. Even noveliser Alan Dean Foster was responsible for elements which became canon, while Sigourney Weaver became a more dominant and involved voice in the crafting of successive films.

Prometheus may have a script co-credited to *Lost* creator Damon Lindelof, but at heart it's just a Ridley Scott film – and it comes along a good few years after that was enough to be an exciting prospect in itself. It's built around a cold, familiar concept that Scott seems to think more original than it really is (and which has already been treated as a joke by Douglas Adams in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and the 1979 Doctor Who serial *City of Death*). But then Scott hasn't made a sci-fi film since *Blade Runner* (1982), and may also not have seen one or – more importantly – read any sci-fi books.

In restaging bits of *Alien* for the new film, Scott gets to do things he must have footnoted in 1979 but not shot (or else they would surely have emerged in his recut of that film): the robot passing the time curiously on the long voyage while the humans are all asleep; the character accused of being a robot who turns out to be human (though Charlize Theron mostly plays board-room bitch in space); Michael Fassbender's robot David (break-out star character of the film) spying on Ellie Shaw's cryo-sleep dreams.

Bluntly, *Alien* was a simple film about people whose most pressing question was whether they would live through the next five minutes. *Prometheus*, by contrast, is a complex movie about people asking big questions about the nature of the universe. It's just that *Alien*'s lost patrol/body count/runaround story takes place in a universe that has been thought about deeply and contains mysteries that connected with audiences – we loved the film because it had a sense of knowing more than it told, which added to its horrors and mysteries. *Alien* is awesome in the old-fashioned sense of 'inspiring awe'. *Prometheus* seems to feel that any exciting genre elements are token, even as its deep thoughts are ultimately shallow.

■ *'Prometheus' is on release, and will be reviewed in the next issue*

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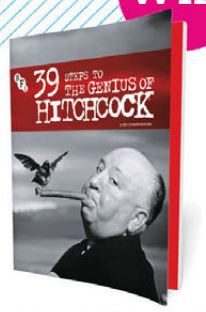

To mark this summer's major 'The Genius of Hitchcock' project at the BFI, the institute is publishing an accompanying compendium which explores the director's life and work in a series of original essays by 39 different writers – among them Patrick McGilligan, Camille Paglia, David Thomson and Guillermo del Toro. Lavishly illustrated with stills and designs – many drawn from the BFI's own archive – the accessible publication will offer new insights to anyone interested in the work of the Master of Suspense.
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a. Hay Fever
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(The book is available exclusively from the BFI Filmstore – in venue or online at www.bfi.org.uk/filmstore from 25th June).

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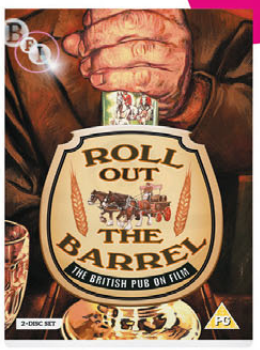

An intoxicating anthology of shorts released by the BFI, *Roll Out the Barrel* is devoted to the most traditional of national institutions: the public house. The double-disc set includes some 19 films made between 1944 and 1982, among them Arnold Miller's *Under the Table You Must Go* and the Guinness-sponsored trade film *Henry Cleans Up*, (starring Monty Python's Michael Palin and Terry Jones as rival landlords). From wartime documentaries to independent productions, this five-and-a-half-hour collection provides a perfect measure of cultural change in Britain over a 40-year period. We have five copies to give away.

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a. Tom Baker
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c. Patrick Troughton

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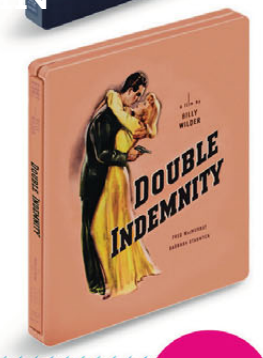

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b. Best Cinematography
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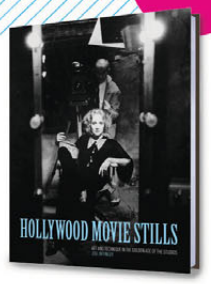

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a. Richard Leach Maddox
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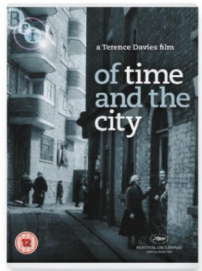

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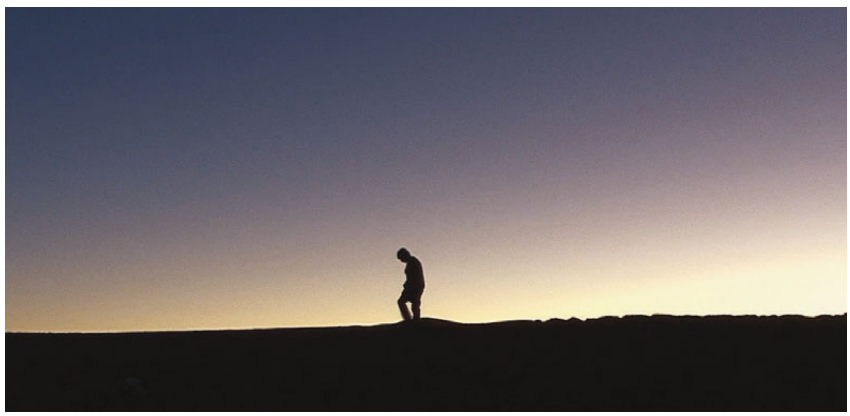
ON STONY GROUND
In 'Nostalgia for the Light', Patricio Guzmán, below right, explores the Atacama Desert, where remains of Pinochet's 'disappeared' are still sought by grieving family members



Known for his radical political documentaries, 70-year-old Chilean director Patricio Guzmán is back with 'Nostalgia for the Light', which links his country's hidden history to the secrets of the stars. He talks to **Chris Darke**

DESERT OF THE DISAPPEARED

A work of wonder and horror, astronomy and atrocity, Patricio Guzmán's sweeping, philosophical film essay *Nostalgia for the Light* (*Nostalgia de la luz*) is a cinematic variant of the childhood thought experiment in which you write down your name, address, country and continent, and in a kind of vertiginous mental crane-shot ascend to take in the planet, galaxy and universe, until the words run out and you're adrift in a sea of stars. Along with Michelangelo Frammartino's *Le quattro volte* (2010) and Hartmut Bitomsky's appropriately dry documentary *Dust* (*Staub*, 2007), it also belongs to a particular sub-genre of films about dust. From the least substantial material imaginable, these films fashion weighty speculations in which dust becomes charged with significance as a symbol of the borderline between being and nothingness, and ceaseless transformation. But Guzmán's dust is not your common corner-of-the-room tumbleweed, as the opening of *Nostalgia for the Light* reveals.

Now in his seventies and a political exile from his homeland for over half his life, Guzmán begins by evoking the Chile of his youth. Revisiting an old astronomical telescope at his birthplace of Santiago, he remembers how, as a boy, he "loved science-fiction stories, lunar eclipses and watching the sun through a piece of smoky glass". He recreates a domestic interior of the time in tableaux-like shots of vintage household objects: an antique sewing machine, a pair of embroidered cushions, jars of pickles on a squat iron stove, every old thing held in the honeyed light of nostalgic recollection.

Intoning softly in Spanish over these lovingly composed still lifes, Guzmán recalls a country in which "Nothing ever happened. Only the present moment existed." There follows a transition so simple in execution yet magical in effect that it's a pity to reveal it to readers who haven't seen the film. A cut takes us to an exterior shot showing the colourful facade of the house, a wind-tossed tree and what looks like a dust storm rising in the street; but the swarming motes sparkle with an unearthly lustre as a cloud of stardust swallows up the past.

Call it a cosmic dissolve or an astral travelling shot, it's a bravura transition performed with a conjuror's flourish, which also serves to establish the film's formal parameters and themes: earth and space, matter and void, and time – cosmological, archaeological and historical. These are grand themes that Guzmán grounds in the specific setting of the Atacama Desert, a 600-mile long expanse in northern Chile, which is visible from space and reputedly the driest place on Earth. "I always intended to make a film which demonstrates the importance of the past, and this led me to the Atacama Desert," Guzmán explains. "The desert is like a planet of the past: everything there comes from the past. There are people, sure, but they're people on an empty planet."

This is not the first time the desert has featured in Guzmán's films. The final shot of *The Battle of Chile* (*La batalla de Chile*, 1977-1980), his epic, three-part, *vérité* account of President Salvador Allende's attempt to establish democratic socialism in Chile and the ensuing US-backed military coup, is a long take of arid land stretching as far as the eye can see: an ambiguous image of the Chilean horizon under the usurper General Pinochet. *The Pinochet Case* (2001), the second film in a 'trilogy of memory' that includes *Chile, Obstinate Memory* (*Chile, la memoria obstinada*, 1997) and *Salvador Allende* (2004), opens with the same landscape being excavated for the remains of people murdered under Pinochet's dictatorship. In *Nostalgia for the Light*, the Atacama Desert is both ossuary and observatory, and Guzmán interviews those who search among its bones, salt and stars: women still digging for traces of murdered loved ones, an archaeologist unearthing vanished Indian settlements, and astronomers surveying the heavens through the most powerful telescopes on Earth.

The apparent irreconcilability of such subjects (how to connect astronomy and atrocity?) provoked resistance from French television, which has previously supported Guzmán's projects; this resulted in a lengthy quest for funding, as he explains: "Everyone said to me, 'Senor Guzmán, this is a *mélange* of anthropology, archaeology, cosmology and human rights. What is it exactly?' I replied, 'You're right, but I've got 38 years of experience, so I'm capable of making something interesting out of it all. It's not going to be like it was made by a first-timer!' They said, 'We'll think about it.' And time passed."

Guzmán's wife and long-time artistic advisor Renate Sachse assumed the role of producer. "We waited for five years," he recalls. "In that time I developed the idea – there are almost 40 versions ➡

STAR ATTRACTION
The Atacama Desert is also the home of observatories, top, where the secrets of the universe are probed

of the screenplay – and it was fascinating to enter this world in which astronomy and archaeology have so much in common. So the delay was positive for the development of the idea, but we were in a desperate situation. Two friends lent us some money. Without them we wouldn't have been able to get started. Then, happily, Spanish TV came through and the [French state funding body] Fonds Sud said yes."

Since its premiere at Cannes in 2010, the film's fortunes have more than vindicated Guzmán's commitment. It has been widely distributed and won over 20 awards, including prestigious Best Documentary prizes from the European Film Academy and the International Documentary Association in the US. Deservedly so; with its breathtaking HD imagery of desert landscapes and deep space, *Nostalgia for the Light* is visually stunning, philosophically intriguing and profoundly moving. While the film continues to explore what Guzmán describes as his "obsession" with the matter of memory, it does so from an unexpected angle: the memory of matter. "It's a philosophical reflection on the relationship between human life and the life of the cosmos, on human memory and the memory of the stars – of infinity," he explains. "As human beings, we are the inheritors of generations upon generations, going back to prehistory, and the matter of our bodies is the matter of the stars. We belong to the Milky Way – that's our home, not just the Earth."

Guzmán's lifelong interest in astronomy (which the film reveals to be a popular Chilean pastime) allows him to explore the nature of time when interviewing Gaspar Galaz, an engaging young astronomer at the state-of-the-art observatories atop the Atacama's high plateaux. Early in the film, Galaz calmly informs Guzmán: "The present doesn't exist." The combination of the speed of light and human reflexes means that everything that happens happened in the past. 'Now' is a mere mental construct. "The present is a fine line?" wonders Guzmán in a mind-blown murmur. Galaz nods, "A puff of air would destroy it." The implicit allusion here to the opening 'cosmic dissolve' develops the film's dust imagery into a metaphor for matter at the mercy of time. The pair's exchange is accompanied by an extraordinary shot of a constellation resembling a rough celestial cicatrice, and images both interstellar and earthly evoke the 'fine line of the present' throughout the film.

While he's best known for his documentaries about Chile's political history, Guzmán has also made a number of essay films, and *Nostalgia for the Light* brings these two strands of his filmmaking together. "I've always thought that the authored documentary is somewhere between journalism and the essay," he explains. "But it's also a form of artistic work, so it's necessarily subjective – a matter of intuitions, comparisons and the juxtaposition of interesting things." And he acknowledges that his essayistic approach in *Nostalgia for the Light* owes something to earlier films such as *Mon Jules Verne* (2005), about the 19th-century French science-fiction writer, and *The Southern Cross (La cruz del Sur*, 1992), which he describes as "a sort of history of Latin America told from the point of view of religion; in its mixture of history and religious reflection there's the germ of *Nostalgia*."

'The matter of our bodies is the matter of the stars. We belong to the Milky Way – not just the Earth'

One of the pleasures of this approach lies in observing how Guzmán forges connections between his subjects; it's not only the spectator who follows his associative train of thought but his interviewees as well. There's a telling moment in his exchange with a snowy-haired archaeologist named Lautaro Nunes, when the director starts to talk about Chile's historical amnesia being the result of the enduring grip of the coup d'état and Nunes, who up to this point has been discussing the Atacama's climate, reaches for his teacup with a knowing smile, as if to say, "I was wondering when that would come up!" When I mention this to Guzmán, he chuckles, describing

it as "a moment of complicity" between himself, Nunes and the audience when the wager of the film is declared: can he make the conceptual leap between the different ideas of historical time at play without it appearing forced?

"Astronomers look millions of years into the past, archaeologists look back tens of thousands of years, but it's the same thing," Guzmán tells me, acknowledging the irony of doing this in a country that has yet to come to terms even with its immediate past. "It's not only recent historical amnesia that's my obsession – the coup d'état and Allende – it's the 100 years of the life of the Chilean republic. Where are the histories of the miners in the Atacama, which had over 80 mines in the 19th century? Where are the Indians of the north and the south? All the indigenous people have disappeared in the same way they did in the conquest of the Far West. So I was very happy with Lautaro, because he suddenly revealed the true depth of the amnesia."

Museum of memories

For those whose personal histories are tied to its use as a prison and killing ground, the Atacama Desert remains a museum of traumatic memories. Guzmán's purpose is to retrieve these memories, and the testimonies he gathers are remarkable. We meet Luis Henriquez, a survivor of the Chacabuco concentration camp – one of the former saltpetre mines adapted by the military – who tells of how he and his fellow inmates "felt completely free" thanks to the clandestine astronomy lessons they took while interned. Another concentration-camp veteran, named only as Miguel, recounts how his architectural training enabled him to memorise the exact dimensions of the camps and then make scale drawings of them when in exile, so their existence could not be denied.

Some of the most compelling contributions come from women from the town of Calama, who continue to search the desert for fragments of bone after 28 years – and in the face of official indifference. Vicky Saavedra recounts how it was only when the remains of her brother were unearthed from a mass grave that she could fully absorb that he was dead. All that was left of him were a few teeth, a bit of skull and a foot bone "still in a burgundy sock". But, she says, "We were reunited." Such details add up to a wrenching account of the agony of searching, waiting and hoping that characterise the experience of families of 'the disappeared'. "We are Chile's leprosy – the lowest of the low," 70-year-old Violeta Berrios tells Guzmán, her features scored with grief and sandblasted by the desert wind. And she wonders what the observatories' telescopes would reveal if they were trained on the desert rather than the stars.

Guzmán turns to astrophysicist George Preston for an answer, and learns that human bones contain the same calcium as stars, the atoms of which were formed moments after the Big Bang. By setting his interest in matter and memory in the context of such a vast cosmological timescale, Guzmán courts a kind of passive scientistic awe, but the skill with which he develops his metaphorical approach to his subjects avoids this trap; and in the film's concluding testimony, astronomy and atrocity are brought together.

Valentina Rodríguez, a mother of two in her thirties who works at Chile's principal astronomical organisation, is the daughter of political prisoners who were detained and 'disappeared'. Calmly and eloquently, she recounts how Pinochet's police arrested her along with her grandparents when she was one year old, and threatened to 'disappear' her unless they gave up her parents. Brought up by her grandparents, who taught her how to observe the stars, Valentina tells Guzmán that astronomy has helped "give another dimension to the pain, the absence and the loss. I tell myself that we are all part of a current, of energy, a recyclable matter. I feel that nothing really comes to an end."

In the press notes for Cannes, Guzmán wrote that Valentina's "serene take on events goes further than ours"; I ask him what he meant by this. "I think that she'd found a 'solution', in inverted commas, for her own mind," he explains. "The metaphor of the atoms of her parents in the Milky Way – it's consoling. It's a way of thinking about things now, but I don't know how she'll think about it in years to come, when she's older. But the discovery of atoms that are immortal – that are in us, that transform and don't die... Well, it's eternal life."

Valentina's apparent serenity is perhaps more than Guzmán can accept, but otherwise her account is very much in keeping with the film, which is essentially atomist. On the one hand, it's poetically atomist in the way Guzmán develops his principal metaphor of dust, visualising an image that reaches back to the Roman poet Lucretius who, in *De Rerum Natura* (*The Nature of Things*), used little motes of dust swirling in a shaft of sunlight in a darkened room to evoke "the dance of atoms". On the other hand, if one understands 'atomisation' sociologically – as the radical isolation of individuals from one another, and the concomitant separation of disciplines – *Nostalgia for the Light* is profoundly counter-atomist in the way it brings together the worlds of science and human affairs. Either way, it's a masterpiece of transcendent (perhaps even transcendental) materialism.

Clearly invigorated by the experience of making the film, Guzmán is excited about future projects. "I'm continuing with this same obsession with the past, memory and the Earth in general," he tells me. "I'm working on another idea, which is that it's the sea – water – that is the memory of Earth. I'm starting with this as my point of departure and I'm writing at the moment. I think that *Nostalgia* is [part of] a diptych, possibly even a trilogy, because I have in my head similar images – well, completely different images, actually – of the same kind of reflection. And if things go well I might make a third film. I think it's a magnificent subject to treat: the Earth's memory!"

Thanks to Michael Chanan for help with research. 'Nostalgia for the Light' is released on 13 July, and is reviewed on page 64. A Q&A with Patricio Guzmán follows the screening on 13 July at BFI Southbank, London, where a season of the director's films plays from 13 to 28 July

LEST WE FORGET
Guzmán has chronicled his country's traumatic recent past in films such as, from the top, 'Salvador Allende', 'The Battle of Chile' and 'The Pinochet Case'

Hugh Hudson's 1985 American War of Independence epic 'Revolution' became a byword for the hubris of the British film industry in the big-spending Goldcrest era. But, as Hudson explains to **Jack Watkins**, *a new director's cut has finally done it justice*

IN THE LINE OF FIRE

There's an irony in the Olympics-inspired return to cinemas of *Chariots of Fire* – the 1981 film that made Hugh Hudson's international reputation – coinciding with the DVD release of the director's cut of *Revolution* (1985), the $28 million epic that almost buried it. With a stage adaptation of *Chariots of Fire* (Hudson's idea) currently running in London, his moving documentary *Rupture: A Matter of Life or Death* – about his wife Maryam d'Abo's battle to recover from a brain haemorrhage – to be screened on BBC4 in July, not to mention a new feature film *Midnight Sun* in pre-production, the 75-year-old director's profile is higher today than it has been for some years.

While Hudson looks back with affection on *Chariots of Fire* – his first feature film, following a distinguished career in commercials and documentaries – it's plain that what most excites him is the chance to present his director's cut of *Revolution* – "frankly, the most daring of my films," as he puts it.

When released at the hubristic height of the Reagan-Thatcher era, the film's anti-war, anti-heroic tone struck a contrarily downbeat note. Many critics were underwhelmed by *Revolution*'s broken narrative and lack of clear signposting of the historical events of the American War of Independence. US critics disliked the fact that 'their' war had been filmed by a British director, while domestic ones were incensed by unflattering portrayals of English imperial attitudes. The greatest scorn was reserved for the performances of the principals: Nastassja Kinski, Donald Sutherland (who's actually strikingly – and in the battle scenes terrifyingly – memorable) and, above all, Al Pacino.

Pacino plays the central character Tom Dobb, a fur trapper who, despite an unwillingness to ally himself to any cause other than survival, finds himself forced to join the rebels when his son is press-ganged into the army. The actor was so devastated by the critical dissection of his performance that he didn't make another film until *Sea of Love* in 1989.

"He was terribly discouraged after all the work and energy he had put in," Hudson reflects. "They criticised him for way he looked, what he did and his accent – as if they knew how people spoke in those days! In fact, there were 26 different nationalities in New York at that time, so we came up with a sort of Scots-American hybrid. We had an expert in language – but of course the critics knew better, and decided it was wrong." In retrospect, the casting of Pacino (then hot off *Scarface*) now seems inspired – a rebuff to those only able to visualise him as a cop or a gangster.

If *Revolution* seemed destined to be forever bracketed alongside Michael Cimino's *Heaven's Gate* as a botched 1980s big-screen historical epic, then the director's cut – its narrative tightened by a first-person voiceover from Pacino's character – demands a rethink. Hudson says the film was released unfinished by Goldcrest at a time when the company had three big films in production, the others being *The Mission* and *Absolute Beginners* – each in budget difficulties, and each attracting press criticism.

"We'd always wanted a narrative," he explains, "and we'd asked for another two or three months to do one because we felt the Dobb character needed it, speaking about the experiences he is going through – things he can't say to anybody because often he's alone. I've always loved the narrator approach anyhow. Some say it's an escape from what's happening on screen, but a lot films – *Sunset Blvd.*, *Jules et Jim*, *Barry Lyndon* – have benefited from it. So I'd presented the idea to Goldcrest financiers, but they needed the film out by Christmas, and we were the first of the three films to be released. We got all the flak and, of course, the public didn't want the film."

More recently, Warner Bros finally stumped up the money for Hudson and Pacino to work on the voiceover they had long desired, and the pair spent several days in a New York studio painstakingly recording new narration written by Joe Hindy. The distance in time between the original filming and the recording creates an almost elegiac effect, owing to the inevitably older, hoarser tone of Pacino's voice, as if the Dobb character is reflecting back philosophically on past events. This, added to the rough-hewn poetry of Hindy's dialogue, is much to the film's advantage, conferring a perspective and clarity many found missing from the original cut.

Hudson has excised a sequence involving the

BATTLE STATIONS
Left to right: Donald Sutherland as the terrifying Sergeant-Major Peasy; Al Pacino as rebel Tom Dobb, with Sid Owen as his son Ned; Hugh Hudson on set

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'It's awful to be knocked back when you've made a film that was quite good anyway'

reunion between Dobb and the heroine Daisy (Kinski), and removed "some of the longueurs you inevitably spot after 25 years. I didn't alter anything radically, only the ending," he adds. "I've shortened the film, whereas normally, of course, director's cuts are longer."

What hasn't changed is the film's emphatically blue-collar viewpoint. Pacino was cast by Hudson because he wanted "this working guy, this rat from the sewers". He says he'd initially considered Richard Gere for the role. "But he's a middle-class person," Hudson points out. "A good actor, but it would have made it a different kind of film. Dobb is a backwoodsman, a self-made man. He doesn't kill loads of people or box his way to success like classic heroes of the Stallone or Schwarzenegger era. He just saves his son."

Many pundits expecting a tableau-style approach were dismayed by the extensive use of handheld camera, deliberately deployed to convey the squalid, muddy uncertainty of war for the ordinary participant, aided by John Corigliano's often haunting score. "I wanted it to seem like the newsroom on the front line," Hudson explains. "Now, of course, handheld is the popular way to shoot film, but it wasn't at the time."

Notwithstanding the depiction of war as an inglorious, desperate crawl, several scenes in the film have a staggering beauty, ranging from the bravura of a hunt sequence to the melancholic lyricism of the smoking battlefield of Yorktown. These are a reminder of Hudson's long-admired eye for composition (in an earlier era he would have been a landscape painter, he says) and his ability to use landscape to underline character and mood.

The critic Alexander Walker once described Hudson as a director in the "grand romantic tradition" of David Lean's later period – but he could have added John Ford, William Wyler or Luchino Visconti. One scene in the 'flowered fields' of Brooklyn Heights calls to mind the artist Paul Nash's sense of discordancy in France in World War I, when hostilities were taking place while the hawthorns were in blossom and the birds were singing.

Hudson agrees: "There is a beauty about war – not humanly of course, but there is this power. And this is a very visual film. At one time I thought I should make it a silent film, with cards, no talk, where you would just feel it. Of course I'd never have got away with it at the time."

British critics have a record of deriding the efforts of directors deemed to have gone into artistic overdrive – Lean, Michael Powell and Ken Russell are just three – but some have already revoked their opinion of *Revolution*. Philip French, a detractor first time around, considers the revised version a masterpiece – "profound, poetic and original". Hudson says his hope now is merely "that people might finally appreciate the film – that its day has come, after 25 years".

But it's clear he still carries scars from the earlier, at times very personal pasting he took ➡

'There is a beauty about war – not humanly, of course, but there is this power'

WINNERS AND LOSERS
Hudson's first feature 'Chariots of Fire' – starring Ben Cross, below – won four Oscars; his third, 'Revolution' was widely reviled on its original release

in the media. "I was at a screening of the recut some months back," Hudson recalls, "and someone well known in the industry came up to me afterwards and said: 'I don't know why you bother.' It was a nasty thing to say. Because I care, that's why! Pacino and I took a lot of trouble over it. We were so wounded by what happened. It's awful to be knocked back when you've made a film that was quite good anyway – and it did affect my career. I really want people to understand why I made this film."

Interestingly, in an essay accompanying the new BFI DVD, Neil Sinyard hints that *Chariots of Fire*, for all its more obvious bankability, is another misunderstood work. Misappropriated by right-wingers as a paean to Thatcherite values, the film's reputation has never quite recovered, Sinyard argues. But before its cinematic reappearance prompts its re-enlistment by a coalition government keen on reaping any nationalistic dividends arising out of the Olympics, it's worth recalling the subtlety with which *Chariots of Fire* subverts ideas about the glory of competing for one's country. Rather, it's an indictment of establishment hypocrisy and racial prejudice. While lacking the visual splendour of Hudson's 1984 follow-up *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes*, it's certainly more than just a nostalgic, flag-waving slice of heritage cinema.

Since the commercial failure of *Revolution*, Hudson has filmed on more modest budgets, though the ongoing thread of loners refusing to settle for the narrowing dictates of conformity remains discernible in his work. *Lost Angels* (aka *The Road Home*, 1989) – an affecting, Palme d'Or-nominated tale about troubled Los Angeles youth – cast Beastie Boy Adam Horovitz alongside Donald Sutherland. It showed Hudson to be as adept at handling contemporary scenarios as period ones, but has barely been seen in the UK. *My Life So Far* (1998), based on the childhood of former BFI director Denis Forman, was a gentler step back into the 1920s. As for the widely unloved *I Dreamed of Africa* (1999), Hudson himself thinks it was miscast, but it drew a strong performance from Kim Basinger as a conservationist and – like the previous two films – carries some typically Hudsonian visual touches.

Hudson has co-scripted his latest project *Midnight Sun*, about a boy and a polar bear travelling though Canada's frozen wastes. "They call it a 'four-quadrant' story," he says, laughing. "I've no idea what that means!"

But however the industry wants to describe the film, it surely marks a return to the sort of epic theme favoured by a director whose values have always been uncompromisingly cinematic.

'Revolution: The Director's Cut' is out on BFI DVD on 18 June, and Hugh Hudson introduces a special screening at BFI Southbank, London on 14 June. A remastered print of 'Chariots of Fire' is rereleased in UK cinemas on 13 July

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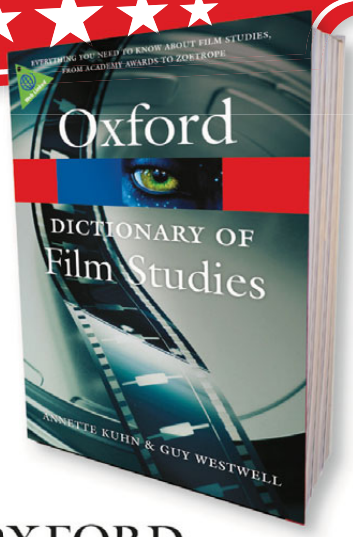

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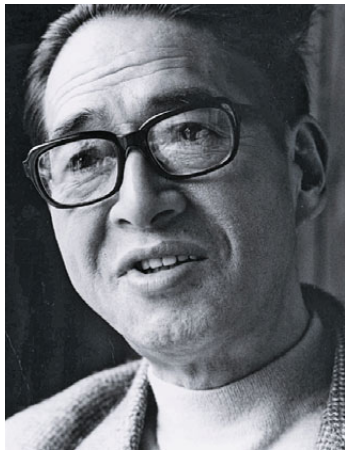
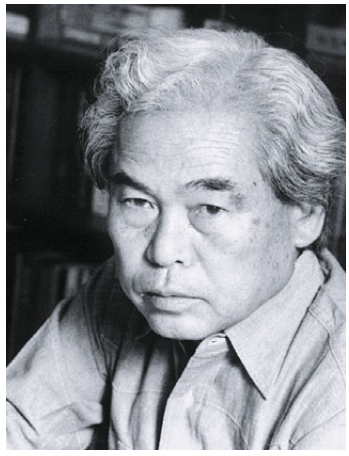
Japanese director Shindo Kaneto, famed for ghost classic 'Onibaba', died in May at the age of 100. To mark a BFI season, **Alexander Jacoby** *pays tribute to the director and his long-term collaborator Yoshimura Kozaburo*

CLASSICAL VIRTUES





GEISHAS AND GHOSTS Yoshimura, right, and Shindo, far right, worked together on films such as 'Clothes of Deception', below left, before Shindo achieved international fame with 'Onibaba', above left

The Japanese director Shindo Kaneto celebrated his 100th birthday in April 2012, an occasion heralded by last year's touring retrospective in the United States, and celebrated with tributes in his hometown of Hiroshima and an ongoing two-month retrospective at BFI Southbank in London. At work in the industry since the 1930s and a director since the 1950s, Shindo made his final film *Postcard (Ichimai no hagaki)* only two years ago, by which time he was among the last living links – and certainly the last active one – to the filmmaking generation of Kurosawa. With an honourable place in the history of Japanese horror on account of his two most widely admired films *Onibaba* (1964) and *Kuroneko* (1968), and with several key works available on DVD, Shindo's international fame seems secure.

But a few months before Shindo turned 100, another centenary had passed almost unnoticed on the international scene. Yoshimura Kozaburo (1911-2000) was not only Shindo's contemporary but also his close collaborator, yet he remains barely known in the West.

When the two men first worked together in 1947, both were already established in the film industry. Shindo had been an art director, screenwriter and assistant director, most notably to Mizoguchi, with whom he worked on *The Straits of Love and Hate* (1937) and *The Loyal 47 Ronin of the Genroku Era* (1941-2). At Shochiku, meanwhile, Yoshimura had been assistant director to Shimazu Yasujiro, pioneer of the *shomin-geki* (films about the lower middle classes). Having directed his first film in 1934, he achieved a major commercial hit with the melodrama *Warm Current* (*Danryu*, 1939), which won him his first mention in *Kinema Junpo* magazine's annual Best Ten critics' poll.

But it was from Shindo's script that Yoshimura directed his first genuine masterpiece, *The Ball at the Anjo House* (*Anjo-ke no butokai*, 1947), which scooped the no. 1 slot in the *Kinema Junpo* poll. The story of a once wealthy house in decline echoes Chekhov and prefigures the sombre mood of Satyajit Ray's *The Music Room* (1958). Despite these parallels, however, the film is urgently engaged with social issues directly confronting a defeated Japan under US occupation. Its subject is the decline of the pre-war upper class, and its context is the policy of land reform and redistribution implemented by the new regime. Also central is the generation gap: while the father of the house tries vainly to preserve the past, it is his daughter Atsuko (Hara Setsuko) who represents hope for the future – and suggests possible ways forward for post-war Japan.

Shindo's concise, intelligent script was as vital to the film as Yoshimura's uncharacteristically flamboyant direction. Shindo went on to script most of Yoshimura's major films, and is unarguably responsible for many of their narrative virtues. Yoshimura gratefully acknowledged Shindo's contribution, modestly observing: "Because I understand my limitations, it is necessary for me to rely on outside help." The collaboration between the two men deepened when they left Shochiku to set up an independent production company, Kindai Eiga Kyokai. Here, with Yoshimura sometimes serving as his producer, Shindo himself began to direct, making his debut with a semi-autobiographical story about a screenwriter, *Story of a Beloved Wife* (*Aisai monagatari*, 1951).

In their different ways, both Yoshimura and Shindo were to explore the social and political issues confronting Japan at a time of dramatic change, when the nation was obliged to take stock of its recent history. The trauma and tragedy of the Pacific War had particular relevance for Shindo. Conscripted as part of a unit of 100 men, he had been one of only six of these not to see active service; the other 94 were all killed. As a native of Hiroshima, moreover, he had a particular personal investment in the subject matter of *Children of Hiroshima* (*Genbaku no ko*, 1952), the first film to dramatise the atomic bombing of the city. This pacifist work was commissioned by the left-wing Japan Teachers' Union, which later condemned the director for having made it "a tearjerker and destroyed its political orientation". But it remains one of Shindo's most moving films, and a testament to the anti-war spirit that took root in Japan after its defeat.

Shindo continued with explicit socio-political commentary in *Epitome* (*Shukuzu*, 1953), a grim geisha story; *The Gutter* (*Dobu*, 1954), a searing account of urban poverty; and *Lucky Dragon No. 5* (*Daigo fukuryu maru*, 1959), a sombre account of the sufferings of a crew of tuna fisherman afflicted by radioactive contamination in the aftermath of US nuclear tests on Bikini Atoll.

Although these films were well received by many critics, they made little money, and Kindai Eiga Kyokai was facing bankruptcy by the time Shindo made – on a minimal budget – the film that restored its fortunes: *The Island* (*Hadaka no shima*, 1960). With its sympathetic chronicle of peasant life, beautiful locations in Japan's Inland Sea and a plaintive score by Hayashi Hikaru, the film won fans both at home and abroad, scooping the Grand Prize at the Moscow Film Festival. It enabled Shindo to sustain his career as an independent filmmaker, and he went on to make *Mother* (*Haha*, 1963), another story about the legacy of Hiroshima.

Yoshimura also directed on occasion for Kindai Eiga Kyokai. *Cape Ashizuri* (*Ashizuri misaki*, 1954) is a trenchant account of the repression of liberals ➡

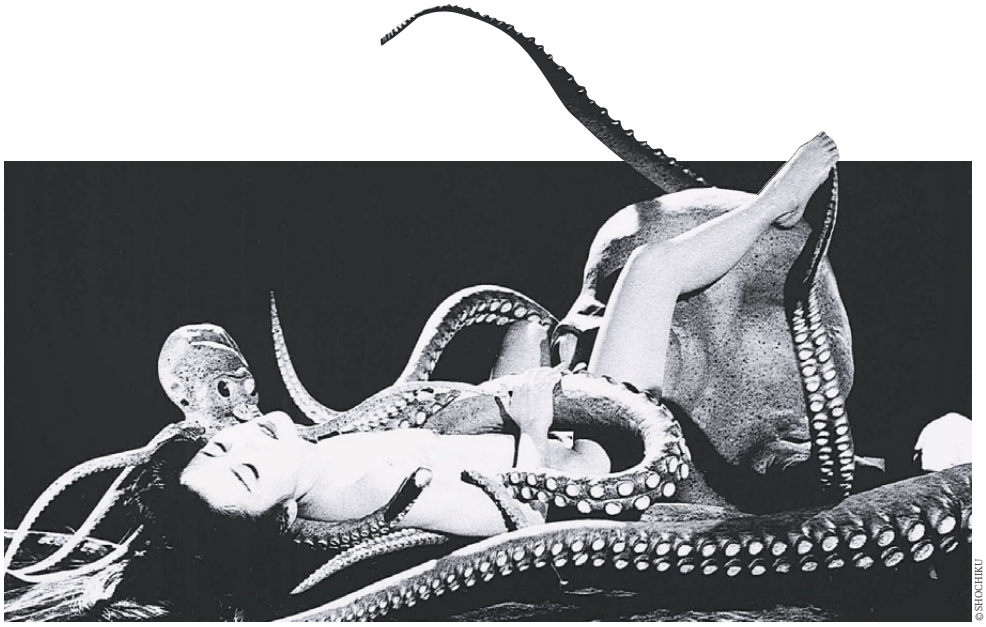
KOBAL COLLECTION (c) JAPAN FOUNDATION/ KINDAI EIGA KYOKAI CO., LTD.

in the era of pre-war militarism. In its explicitly political theme and forceful style, it seems closer to Shindo's own directorial work than to the majority of Yoshimura's films, which emerged from within the studio system. In 1951 Yoshimura had approached Daiei in order to realise – again from Shindo's script – his outstanding study of women in Kyoto's Gion district, *Clothes of Deception (Itsuwareru seiso)*. Once at the studio he went on to work on a number of prestige projects, such as the lavish 1951 adaptation of the Heian-era prose classic *The Tale of Genji (Genji monogatari)*, commissioned by Daiei to celebrate the studio's tenth anniversary and supervised by respected novelist Tanizaki Junichiro, who had translated Murasaki Shikibu's original 11th-century text into modern Japanese. Yoshimura won critical acclaim, and the film became Japan's biggest commercial hit up to that date.

But it was *Clothes of Deception* that initiated Yoshimura's most characteristic vein. This geisha story is often described as a loose remake of Mizoguchi's pre-war masterpiece *Sisters of Gion* (1936), but this is inexact. Whereas in Mizoguchi's study of two sisters, both women had been geisha, in Yoshimura's film only Kimicho (Kyo Machiko) is, while her sister works in the Kyoto tourist office. Juxtaposing a traditional Kyoto profession with a modern one, Yoshimura shows how life in the old capital was changing in the wake of wider transformations in Japanese society.

All the same, the emotional register of the film is not dissimilar to Mizoguchi, with whom Yoshimura was often compared. Indeed it was Yoshimura who would take over direction of *Osaka Story* (*Osaka monogatari*, 1957), the film left unfinished by Mizoguchi on his untimely death. And Mizoguchi's influence was apparent in Yoshimura's sympathetic engagement with the trials of women: *Clothes of Deception* was the first in a remarkable sequence of films about working women in Japan's old capital, Kyoto. *Sisters of Nishijin* (*Nishijin no shimai*, 1952) traces the decline of traditional industry in Kyoto's main textile-making district. *Night River* (aka *Undercurrent/Yoru no kawa*, 1956) shows a woman embarking on an affair with a married scientist while working in the profession of kimono dyeing and design. Later, Okada Mariko starred in the moving *A Woman's Uphill Slope* (*Onna no saka*, 1960), which again focuses on a woman facing romantic difficulties while working in a traditional profession – this time sweetmaking.

Taken together, these films are not only Yoshimura's finest achievement, but one of the Japanese cinema's richest and most complex accounts of social change, the position of women in the new Japan, and the conflict between tradition and modernity. Yet the rest of Yoshimura's rich and varied output should not be overlooked. In *Women of Ginza* (*Ginza no onna*, 1955) and *Night Butterflies* (*Yoru no cho*, 1957) he dramatises with equal adeptness the lives of geisha and bar hostesses in the new capital, Tokyo. During the Occupation, he made the period film *Ishimatsu of the Forest* (*Mori no Ishimatsu*, 1949), which in the words of critic Kyoko Hirano "denounced in a satirical comedic style the useless vanity of yakuza loyalty". *The*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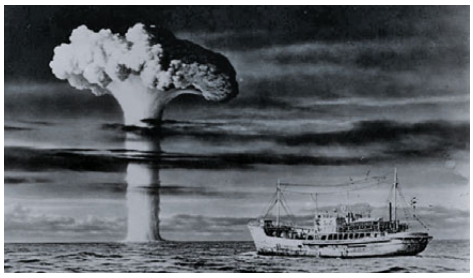

NAKED TRUTH
Shindo's seven-decade career includes films as diverse as, clockwise from top: 'Edo Porn', 'Mother', 'The Island' and 'Lucky Dragon no.5'

Beauty and the Dragon (*Bijo to kairyu*, 1955), by contrast, was described by Joseph Anderson and Donald Richie as "the only successful film version of the kabuki ever completed".

New styles

Shindo too repeatedly sought to explore new genres and styles. In the mid-1960s he realised two fine essays in the supernatural, *Onibaba* and *Kuroneko*. Both dramatically intense and visually splendid, these remain his most famous films abroad – a status no doubt sustained by the recent international interest in Japanese horror. But despite their generic novelty, they retain the social consciousness that characterised Shindo's earlier work, finding horror in the class divisions of feudal Japanese society. Left-wing critic Joan Mellen has gone so far as to call the films "paeans to the strength of the peasants whose history the chronicles of the exploiting few have sought to deny and suppress". The increasing erotic content of these and other works by Shindo in the 1960s was also given social implications. As Mellen wrote: "At their best, Shindo's films involve a merging of the sexual with the social. His radical perception isolates man's sexual life in the context of his role as a member of a specific social class."

Through the 1950s and 1960s, Shindo remained an imaginative cinematic stylist with a penchant for striking imagery and an interest in formal experimentation. In *Children of Hiroshima*, he visualised the bombing in an intense montage sequence inspired by Soviet silent cinema. *The Island*, made without dialogue, conveyed its meaning solely through the body language of the actors, the sound effects and music, the use of landscape and the position of the camera. In *Onibaba* and *Kuroneko*, his flamboyant direction was complemented by Kuroda Kiyomi's stunning chiaroscuro cinematography and Hayashi Hikaru's menacing scores.

Yoshimura's style, by contrast, was generally simpler and more classical. In his early years, inspired by German silent-era master F.W. Murnau, he adopted a somewhat experimental camera style, traces of which remain in the occasionally baroque technique of *The Ball at the Anjo House*. But subsequently, under the influence of William Wyler, he moved away from experimentation towards an understated, more conventional *mise en scène*. Yet if the style of his mature work in the 1950s is less distinctive than that of some of his contemporaries, Yoshimura was a master storyteller. His attention to nuances of characterisation and subtleties of emotion was matched by his ability to shape compelling, coherent narratives through the choice of camera position and camera distance.

Primarily a studio filmmaker, Yoshimura's work declined – perhaps inevitably – as the norms of the Japanese film industry altered during the 1960s. *Bamboo Doll of Echizen* (*Echizen take ningyo*, 1963) still showed some of his old talent but, beset by ill health, he made fewer films of real value. Nevertheless, his last work, the independently produced *The Tattered Banner* (*Ranru no hata*, 1974), earned him a final ranking in the *Kinema Junpo* Best Ten. In 1976, after his retirement, he was awarded the Medal of Honour with Purple Ribbon, given by the Japanese government for distinguished contributions to the arts.

Portraits of the artist

There was no stopping Shindo, however, who was to work prolifically through the subsequent decades and into the 21st century. His style grew less showy, simpler and more classical, but his thematic concerns showed an increasing self-consciousness, with a recurrent interest in artist figures that recalled the themes of his debut, *Story of a Beloved Wife*. He paid tribute to his mentor Mizoguchi in a 1975 documentary, while in *The Life of Chikuzan* (*Chikuzan hitori tabi*, 1977) he retold the harsh youthful experiences of Chikuzan Takahashi, a shamisen player from northern Japan who became a cult figure in later life. The film intercuts live concert footage of the middle-aged Chikuzan with dramatised reconstructions of his youth. Shindo's later artist portraits include *Edo Porn* (*Hokusai manga*, 1981), an iconoclastic biopic of the celebrated 19th-century woodblock artist Hokusai; *The Strange Story of Oyuki* (*Bokuto kidan*, 1992), about the writer and *flâneur* Nagai Kafu, who had chronicled Tokyo's interwar *demi-monde*; and another documentary, *Sakuratai chiru* (1988), examining the lives and work of the members of a left-wing theatre group who perished at Hiroshima.

Unsurprisingly for a filmmaker active into his nineties, Shindo has also addressed the topic of old age, most centrally in *The Last Note* (*Gogo no yiugonjo*, 1995). For this he marshalled a superb veteran cast, including the poignant last appearance of his wife and regular star Otowa Nobuko (a fixture in his films as far back as his debut, the aptly named *Story of a Beloved Wife*); she died of cancer only days after shooting was completed. Shindo himself, however, kept working. In his last film *Postcard*, directed from a wheelchair, he revisited the legacy of the Pacific War, which remained the defining lifetime trauma for his generation of Japanese.

In old age, Shindo became something of an institution: he was pronounced a person of cultural merit in 1998, was awarded the Order of Culture in 2002 and won the Japan Academy Lifetime Achievement Award in 2003. At his 100th birthday celebrations, his granddaughter Shindo Kaze – herself an active filmmaker – declared: "My grandfather hopes that his works will endure for a long period of time."

And indeed, at their centenaries, the films of Yoshimura and Shindo remain both fascinating and moving. Living through some of the most turbulent times in Japanese history, they sustained careers spanning war, occupation, and the post-war years of prosperity and modernisation. Their films chart the experience of those times, and constitute a valuable historical record of life in 20th-century Japan. But their importance is not only historical. Both men were compelling dramatists and filmmakers of profound compassion and humanity. It is time to celebrate their joint and separate achievements.

■ *The season 'Two Masters of Japanese Cinema' plays until the end of July at BFI Southbank, London*

Mizoguchi's influence was apparent in Yoshimura's sympathetic engagement with the trials of women

FEMALE TROUBLES
Yoshimura's interest in the social conditions of women found voice in films such as, from top: 'Night River', 'The Ball at the Anjo House' and 'Night Butterflies'

Over half a century in the public eye, Shirley MacLaine may have spread her eccentric charm somewhat thin, but in a handful of roles – not least 'The Apartment' – she's unforgettable. In our occasional series 'The Actors', **Dan Callahan** *assesses her career*

SHIRLEY MACLAINE

A DAME FOR ALL SEASONS

Richard Linklater's new film *Bernie* tells the true story of a small-town Texas mortician who befriends a grouchy widow, takes control of her finances – and proceeds to murder her. The title role is played by Jack Black, and it should come as no surprise that the widow is played by the seemingly indestructible Shirley MacLaine, an actress who has been lending her off-kilter talents to such subversive comedies for the best part of six decades, her kewpie-doll face nearly as unchanging as her short red hairstyle.

Success came early for MacLaine, in circumstances that sound like an old Warner Bros musical, when dancer Carol Haney broke her ankle and MacLaine was rushed on in her place in *The Pajama Game* on Broadway, with no rehearsal. The number 'Steam Heat' was filled with perilous choreography involving the tossing of hats, and when MacLaine dropped hers at one point, she cried, "Shit!" before going to retrieve it. The audience wasn't offended; in fact, they loved her frankness, her exuberance. In almost no time, the 21-year-old MacLaine had a movie contract with producer Hal B. Wallis and a debut role as the lead in an Alfred Hitchcock film, *The Trouble with Harry* (1955) – a small-town comedy of corpse disposal, not so far in tone from Linklater's dark comedy of over half a century later.

BREATH OF FRESH AIR
Far from the conventional ice-cold Hitchcock heroine, MacLaine made her debut in 'The Trouble with Harry,' above; opposite, a 1950s glamour shot

MacLaine is still green in that comic Hitchcock movie, moving awkwardly and giving uncertain line readings, but her speaking voice is already unmistakeable – slightly nasal, clotted, preoccupied. She was such an unusual type that she got by on novelty for a time, and Wallis cast her opposite Jerry Lewis in Frank Tashlin's *Artists and Models* (1955), where she goes into contortions in an attempt to match Lewis's frantic talent; there is no more grotesque seduction scene in film history than MacLaine's violent wooing of Lewis on a staircase. She's unfocused in the Tashlin film, but in two movies opposite the actress Shirley Booth, *Hot Spell* and *The Matchmaker* (both 1958), MacLaine settled down and started to pick up the technique that would serve her in her most notable work. That same year, she played Ginnie Moorehead alongside Frank Sinatra's Dave Hirsh in Vincente Minnelli's *Some Came Running* – her first hooker role, which earned her her first Academy Award nomination for Best Actress.

MacLaine had come from musical comedy and it could be said that she has a musical-comedy approach to acting. Many of her filmic breakdowns or freak-outs are put over like show-stopping songs or dances; they're an event, something to see, larger than life. When Ginnie goes to visit her schoolteacher rival for Dave's affections (Martha Hyer) in *Some Came Running*, MacLaine is well aware that this is her 'big scene', and she plays it with all kinds of performing bells and whistles going off to show us Ginnie's surface sloppiness but true-blue inner character. ➡

PHOTOFEST NYC (1)

There's a special glow about MacLaine in 'The Apartment', an alertness. Miss Kubelik's face is sweetly forlorn, but sharp little jabs of unconscious anger animate it sometimes

BFI STILLS, POSTERS AND DESIGNS (3)/KOBAL COLLECTION (1)

GRANDSTANDING
'Terms of Endearment', left, and 'Postcards from the Edge', below, display MacLaine's later taste for 'Oscar-clip' performances

MacLaine came to specialise in what could be called 'Oscar-clip' acting: the maximum outlay of emotion for the maximum impact in individual scenes. Ginnie is moving in a facile way, but she is also a cultural stereotype that MacLaine got stuck in for a number of years afterwards.

Sweetly forlorn

It was in her second Oscar-nominated role that MacLaine really showed what she was capable of. In Billy Wilder's *The Apartment* (1960), she plays Fran Kubelik, an elevator operator at a large Manhattan insurance company. Wilder cannily explains that trademark short hair of hers as a sign of self-destructiveness: "It was makin' me nervous, so I chopped it off... Big mistake, huh?" Fran explains to C.C. Baxter (Jack Lemmon), in a voice that sounds close to hopeless. Miss Kubelik's face is sweetly forlorn, but sharp little jabs of unconscious anger animate it sometimes, as when she gets goosed by one of the higher-ups who use Baxter's apartment as a love nest. There's a special glow about MacLaine in *The Apartment*, a sensitivity, an alertness. She is open here and unguarded, as if she's putting some of her own doubts on screen under the guise of a helpless working-class girl who couldn't be more unlike her own offscreen image of gamy confidence.

When Fran's married lover Mr Sheldrake (Fred MacMurray) tries to buy her off with 100 dollars, she looks up at him as if she wants to kill him – but instead she tries to kill herself. In her stage shows and in her many memoirs, MacLaine's narcissism can seem downright absurd – and the opposite of narcissism, of course, is self-loathing. After Fran tries to overdose on pills in Baxter's apartment, MacLaine powerfully expresses a sense of deep self-loathing – the kind that might make someone take to their bed for a week or more. This is a girl who has moments of suicidal weakness, but she also has a touching kind of gallantry, a peculiar mix of grace under pressure and nihilism that's expressed best when Baxter tells her that her compact has a broken mirror, and she responds, "I like it that way. Makes me look the way I feel." After the desolation we have witnessed in the lives of Baxter and Fran, even Wilder's wisecracking and all the careful playing in the world can't quite make *The Apartment*'s happy ending click convincingly.

MacLaine moved even further into feelings of self-hatred in William Wyler's *The Children's Hour* (1961), as the repressed lesbian schoolteacher Martha Dobie, a woman unconsciously in love with her co-worker Karen (Audrey Hepburn). In the climactic scene, when Martha confesses her feelings for Karen, there's something nearly unseemly about the way MacLaine dives into this woman's panic and despair. No one seems to know what they are doing in this movie (least of all Wyler, who holds himself back from the material as if he wants to keep an alibi of plausible deniability), but MacLaine still manages to find the core of her character's grief by the end of this confessional monologue. She stumbles around the subject a bit, she shakes her head and crouches away from Hepburn; she fills her tart, chirpy voice with full-blooded hysteria, so that it blows up like a trumpeter's cheeks;

but she does finally locate Martha's shame specifically and empathetically.

In the 1960s, MacLaine's salary increased while her high-budget comedy films deteriorated in quality – not least her laboured 1963 reunion with Wilder and Lemmon, as a French hooker in *Irma la Douce*. By the end of the decade she was set for her first comeback attempt, Bob Fosse's *Sweet Charity* (1968), a musical version of Fellini's *Nights of Cabiria* in which MacLaine played her ultimate tart-with-a-heart-of-gold role and pushed it so hard for pathos that she lost her audience from frame one. The movie flopped, so she pulled back for *Desperate Characters* (1971), a stripped-down, faithful adaptation of Paula Fox's great novel in which MacLaine showed a surprising intellectual engagement with Fox's most astringent, clear-eyed ideas about urban life. MacLaine does the naturalistic opposite of Oscar-clip acting in *Desperate Characters*, but that film made no impact, and she never tried this approach again. A brush with horror exploitation, *The Possession of Joel Delaney* (1971), scared her away from movies until a second stab at a comeback in *The Turning Point* (1977), in which she plays an Oklahoma wife and mother with tired eyes who gave up her ballet career for a family.

Far more impressive, however, was her political wife in Hal Ashby's masterful comedy *Being There* (1979), in which MacLaine plays the entire film on a delicately hushed note of droll cluelessness. This is a tightrope-walking movie and performance; one false or overdone note and the whole thing would fall apart. As Eve Rand, a cosseted woman who falls for the idiot savant Chance (Peter Sellers), MacLaine is as open as she was as Fran Kubelik, but more willing to take chances – as in her scene of masturbation after Chance tells her, "I like to watch." The joke of her performance here is how love can be such an entirely one-sided thing, and MacLaine is the ideal actress to put this joke across.

In Ashby's laidback, almost otherworldly films, he patiently gave his players the time they needed to expose different sides of themselves, allowing them take after take to explore the shy, private details of their characters, and MacLaine flowers under this attention, just as her younger brother Warren Beatty did in Ashby's earlier *Shampoo* (1975). Aside from a certain shared surface preoccupation, MacLaine and Beatty usually feel very different from each other on screen; he is recessive, whereas she has an extrovert's showy energy. Only in their Ashby movies do these two major stars raised in the same small Virginia household seem to speak the same behavioural language, as if they've decided to play an after-school game of 'let's pretend' with each other for the same sweetly stoned auteur.

Oscar-clip acting

In *The Apartment* and *Being There*, MacLaine is at the centre of two classic comedies, and in both she is subtle, exploratory, intelligent and very resourceful. She's touching in those films because she doesn't ask for our sympathy (just as she is touching for exactly ten seconds in *Sweet Charity*, when her humiliated dance-hall hostess leaves an employment office and tries not to cry as she walks to an elevator).

NOTE PERFECT
MacLaine as the political wife besotted with Chance (Peter Sellers) in Hal Ashby's 'Being There'

If she had only made those two movies, MacLaine would deserve her place as one of our best comic actresses. But there were many other films, of course, including her third, decisive comeback *Terms of Endearment* (1983), which finally won her an Oscar. And no wonder, for it contains the ultimate Oscar-clip acting: 30 seconds where MacLaine's Aurora Greenway demands that nurses give her dying daughter Emma (Debra Winger) a painkiller shot. It's almost a choreographed dance routine, starting at one nurse's station where MacLaine tugs impatiently at her wristwatch; after getting put off there, she works herself quickly down to another nurse's station, gets put off again, moves away rapidly and throws her arms out helplessly, makes her way around to a counter to pound her fists on it and cry, "She's... a... in pain. My daughter's in pain!" and then finally arrives back in front of Emma's room to blast out, "Give my daughter the sho-ahhh-t!" in a voice that couldn't be louder or brassier or more insistent – as if Aurora were a musical-comedy star of Oscar emotion. And then comes the easy joke right after the explosion: the muttered, polite, "Thank you, very much," as if MacLaine is giving her Oscar-acceptance speech already.

Terms immediately re-established her in what would become increasingly cartoonish harpy roles. MacLaine is way over the top as a piano teacher in *Madame Sousatzka* (1988), and a very broad, coarse clown in *Steel Magnolias* (1989). The directors of those movies (John Schlesinger and Herbert Ross) allowed and encouraged all of her lowest instincts for audience-clobbering showmanship, but in 1990, for Mike Nichols, she reined herself in one more time for the tricky role of the mother in *Postcards from the Edge*, based on Carrie Fisher's book. As Doris Mann, an MGM star of the Debbie Reynolds school, MacLaine wears rouge on her cheeks that looks as red as her wig; and she talks here as if she is always being interviewed, or acting for an audience. This is a woman who speaks in old MGM publicity clichés mixed with downright weird tangents; when Doris tells her daughter (Meryl Streep) about a dream she had, the lightly buzzing way MacLaine talks is the height of self-enclosed narcissism, especially when she describes, with the lowest possible inflection, "a very heavy sequined gown, dragging me down".

Yet the film – and Fisher, who wrote the script – regards the trouper Doris kindly, even when she's competing with her daughter at a party and singing 'I'm Still Here' in a way that only expresses her unconscious resentment of her audience, her brutish determination and her tinsel-beneath-the-tinsel phoniness. This is an expertly shaped performance that only gives way to Oscar-clip acting towards the end: once during a fight scene with Streep where she does a classic MacLaine vocal trumpet blast on the line "It twirled up!"; and again in a penultimate scene in a hospital bed with no wig or make-up that's heavy on Oscar-baiting, self-congratulatory bravery. In retrospect, it's odd that MacLaine wasn't nominated for this gently mocking film – her last serious bid for award attention.

In the last 20 years, MacLaine has continued to work, mainly avoiding television, where most actresses of her age usually wind up; and she has ceded her old screen place to obvious successors like Renée Zellweger and Anne Hathaway, who have made careers purveying versions of MacLaine's crinkle-eyed, all-around crowdpleasing. She did a sequel to *Terms of Endearment* called *The Evening Star* (1996), and in 2000 she directed a film, *Bruno*, about a boy who likes to cross-dress – which signalled her alignment with all nonconformists.

Throughout her long career, MacLaine has been more than chatty about her 30-year open marriage to Steve Parker (producer of two of her least distinguished 1960s films, *My Geisha* and *John Goldfarb, Please Come Home*), her tempestuous relationship with brother Warren, and her belief in reincarnation and extraterrestrial life. In all of her talk-show appearances, which begin to seem at least as substantial as her film work, she has a blithe reasonableness even when she's speaking about the most outlandish ideas, so that the 'young bohemian kook' persona of her early career has smoothly adapted into the imperturbable attention-seeking of an eccentric old lady.

Alas *Bernie*, which flopped in the US, seems unlikely to mark a late flowering of the tough character comedy of MacLaine's best work. She has recently joined the cast for the forthcoming third series of ITV's *Downton Abbey* – perhaps the best the small screen has to offer as a showcase for those Oscar-clip talents; she has also been awarded the American Film Institute's Lifetime Achievement Award.

Does this count as her fifth comeback, or her sixth? It's difficult to say, just as it's difficult for most people to remember a time when MacLaine wasn't omnipresent in some medium or other. She is concerned with past and future lives, and many other metaphysical issues, but twice – at least – on screen, she imagined other lives so fully that it's fruitful to wonder whether Eve Rand did indeed become First Lady to Chance when he ascended to the presidency, or if Fran Kubelik is still playing gin rummy with C.C. Baxter in some small Midwestern town – or if her urge to self-annihilation won out over her in the end.

■ *'The Apartment' is rereleased on 15 June, and also plays as part of the Shirley MacLaine season that runs at BFI Southbank, London, until 30 June; 'Downton Abbey' returns to ITV later in 2012*

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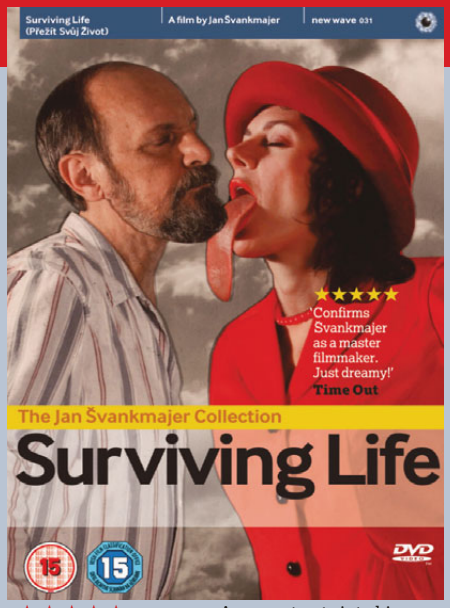
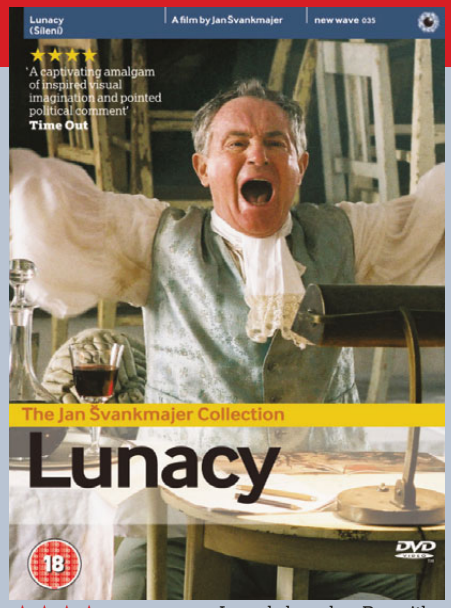
The Jan Švankmajer Collection



★★★★★
'Confirms Švankmajer as a master film-maker'
Time Out

A man retreats into his dream-world with his ideal woman in this comic, bizarre and ultimately poignant psychoanalytical comedy.

Available 11 June on DVD and download



★★★★
'A captivating amalgam of visual imagination political comment'
Time Out

Loosely based on Poe with some de Sade mixed in, this philosophical horror film combines premature burial, blasphemy and animated meat.

Available 25 June on DVD and download

'As black, sly and subversive as ever… marvellously morbid'
Time Out

Six characters in search of solitary erotic pleasures: a blackly humorous dissection of fetishism, featuring bread rolls, carp, fur and a TV designed for stimulation.

Available 25 June on DVD and download

Order from amazon.co.uk or download from iTunes

Reviews

52 FILM OF THE MONTH 54 FILMS 84 DVDS 92 BOOKS

Reviews, synopses and credits for all the month's new films, plus the pick of the new books and DVDs

Killer Joe William Friedkin's story of cluelessly venal trailer-trash tangling with a sexually menacing ambassador of death is pitched somewhere between Jim Thompson and Tennessee Williams ☞ p62

Animal magnetism

With its enigmatic tale of a stranger shaking up a small town on the fringes of Turkey, 'Kosmos' confirms Reha Erdem as a director of mysterious vision, whose characters move beyond language. By **Trevor Johnston**

Kosmos

Reha Erdem, 2009

If the films of Nuri Bilge Ceylan have taught us one thing, it's that Turkey has very photogenic snow. That much is also evident in this most recent offering from his countryman Reha Erdem, which opens in a striking white-out landscape from which emerges a sole human figure, a mysterious stranger soon to change the lives of those he encounters in the nearby town. The location is Kars in north-eastern Turkey, near the closed border with Armenia – and incidentally the setting for Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk's 2002 novel *Snow*. But Erdem's film never mentions the place by name – just one indication of its retreat from realism into a celluloid world that actively resists definition.

Indeed, there's a lot about *Kosmos* that's hard to pin down. At first the eponymous protagonist seems to possess healing powers, as he brings a drowned child back from the dead. Later, though, those gifts seem on the wane as events take a tragic turn, and Sermet Yesil's wide-eyed man of mystery also proves wary of becoming a healer-on-demand for the afflicted who start lining up outside his door.

What is it that drives this oddball character? Invited to stay in town by the father of the single mother whose boy he saved, he resists any encouragement to pay for his keep by actually working. Existing on a diet of tea and sugar lumps, he embarks on misadventures including a sexual assignation with a frustrated spinster schoolmistress, an attempt to wean an army captain's ailing mother-in-law off her addiction to painkillers, and the formation of an intriguing bond with a kindred spirit – the aforementioned single mum. These two communicate via bird calls and animal noises, and even express their feelings for each other by leaving gravity behind, suggesting that each might be some sort of Ariel-like spirit in human form. Moreover, when they decide on secret names to codify their connection, he calls himself "Kosmos" and she calls herself "Neptün" – elemental choices that hint at realms unencumbered by everyday human borders.

Neptün and Kosmos communicate via bird calls and animal noises, and even express their feelings for each other by leaving gravity behind

What is clear is that Kosmos, wherever he's come from, certainly doesn't fit in with his current surroundings, where Erdem flags up a whole array of more worldly concerns: the soldiers whose booming offscreen artillery fire signals military manoeuvres going on nearby (presumably a show of strength directed at the Armenians on the other side); the rival political activists trying to whip up support for and against the opening of the border; even the four local brothers from different mothers locked in conflict over their inheritance. Yesil's brilliantly attuned performance absolutely nails his character's sheer otherworldliness, conveying through movement and vocalisation his animal and spiritual aspects, and delivering Kosmos's gnomic pronouncements with enough conviction to maintain our curiosity. It's no small task for any actor to manage all this, and he's certainly one reason to see the film.

Kosmos sagely informs the men in the local café: "For him who is joined to all that is living, there is hope." Elsewhere – as he insists there are no boundaries between rich and poor, man and beast – there's a slippery relativism about his pearls of wisdom. Still, that phrase about "him who is joined to all that is living" seems the key line, since Erdem's formal strategies bear out its import. Repeatedly he cuts to the cows facing their demise in the slaughterhouse, suggesting some mysterious empathy with the free-spirited protagonist, whose cries and yelps of affection for his beloved Neptün appear more bestial than human in origin. The military backdrop flags up ongoing questions of Turkish national self-definition, yet the suggestion is that we should all be looking at the bigger picture, a literally cosmic overview of pantheistic oneness outweighing such concerns about lines on a map.

FIGURES IN A LANDSCAPE
Arriving in a small Turkish town, a stranger who calls himself Kosmos (Sermet Yesil, above right) strikes up a strange relationship with a local single mother (Türkü Turan, above left)

On the soundtrack, electronic interference fizzes away like messages from some distant galaxy, as repeated shots of the town clock mark the passing hours, Erdem encouraging the viewer's thoughts to stray outside the frame in space and time. Perhaps there's something so grandiose about such notions that they become almost banal – different viewers will certainly take different positions on that; but Erdem's film is never cut and dried about anything, pretty much leaving thematic and narrative completion to the viewer. That said, it's a strikingly imaginative effort, a haunting and poetic film from a major talent who's been gathering admirers on the international circuit since his breakthrough film *Times and Winds (Bes vakit)* back in 2006.

The product of a Parisian film school, Erdem works consistently with the brilliant Belgian cinematographer Florent Herry, and is open in his admiration of the likes of Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Tsai Ming-Liang; he's clearly as internationalist in his outlook as, say, Kiarostami (with whom he shares a facility for exquisitely framed landscapes and gliding travelling shots). He is definitely his own man, however, in terms of playing out culturally specific Turkish concerns within a larger and broadly philosophical framework. *Times and Winds*, for instance, is a village rites-of-passage

tale looking at how macho paternalism creates a cycle of repression and suffering; yet it intercuts those vignettes with startling tableaux where the children in the story (perhaps dead?) are weathered into the landscape itself, contrasting their momentary travails with the essential truths of geological time.

With Herry's luxuriant images beautifying rural hardship, plus swathes of Arvo Pärt on the soundtrack, it's no wonder that *Times and Winds* – for all its slightly capricious storytelling – captivated arthouse audiences. Sadly, rather fewer of them saw Erdem's follow-up *My Only Sunshine* (*Hayat Var*, 2008 – though it is available on the online platform MUBI), another saga of growing up, this time by the Bosphorus, where the spectacular visuals of small fishing boats darting in and around passing tankers can't quite mask a slim through-line (the adolescent heroine is no longer a child, not yet a woman) which barely sustains two hours of screen time. Again, the soundtrack bustles with offscreen aircraft and train noises hinting at bigger and better things beyond, yet the repetitive accretion of detail that worked in *Times and Winds* seemed more mannerist and exasperating second time around.

Then again, there are obvious risks involved in the way Erdem likes to build up his films in layers, returning again and again to his characters' daily routines and ongoing dilemmas to build narratives through rhythm, patterning and contrast. If you look at Ceylan's work, there's always a sense of a linear trajectory, so that even if the end point is tellingly unresolved (see *Once upon a Time in Anatolia*), the journey towards meaning – towards trying to lock down a reading of reality within each film's social environs – is of significance to the characters.

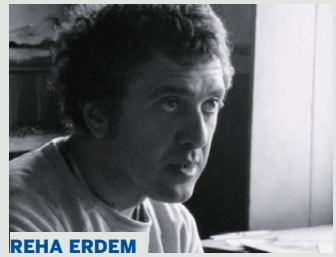
With Erdem, on the other hand, the three films of his creative maturity all operate in a cyclical manner, building up over time a rendering of a particular community or situation about which the filmmaker has things to say. However, the rhythm of returning to particular characters is often just about all that holds his stories together; you sense that Erdem is trying to free himself from the confines of linear plot development, yet the outcome is that there's never quite enough impetus to drive his stories forward, and the challenge of finding an end to the cycle can also be a problem for him. Certainly, *My Only Sunshine* crumbles at the last, while the final reel of *Kosmos* is surely its relative weakness too.

Still, there's no question throughout his films that you're engaging with a distinctive sensibility trying to find new ways to tell stories – which is part of what makes his output so striking. *Kosmos* is undoubtedly highly personal, and not a little puzzling at times, yet there's more to it than beguiling visuals and captivating exoticism. It's rich and rewarding because, in more ways than one, Erdem is reaching for the stars.

For credits and synopsis, see page 64

Crossing the border

Reha Erdem on the mystique of his protagonist and his location



REHA ERDEM

For me, Kosmos represents an ideal, a utopian figure. Not an end that can be striven towards – I mean something impossible, as is true of all ideals. While the other characters in the film are like you or me, Kosmos has got beyond this; he has transcended the 'ordinary'. He's bolder. Kosmos is a fantastical figure. Not in the sense that you'd have to be deranged to be like him; rather that it isn't possible to be so bold and so independent in life. The nearest you can get to that point is to create a character like Kosmos. Otherwise, I just don't have the courage. If only I did...

My choice of Kars [a border town in the north-east of Turkey] as the setting for the story has to do with its sense of timelessness; it's a place that seems to belong to no particular time. It also has a unique rhythm, demeanour and landscape. The snow buries everything – it's a hugely cinematographic place. My inspiration came when I went to Kars as a guest of [the travelling film festival] the Festival on Wheels. It struck me as extraordinarily beautiful, and full of the mystique of a border town.

All the talk is of an invisible border: "The border's been opened, the border hasn't been opened..." And the border always implies a threat. By that I mean the 'other' lies beyond it. Perhaps there are only the likes of Kosmos. Perhaps there are two thousand of his kind waiting to flee. And that's a threat; after all, they're 'strangers', aren't they?

All in Good Time

United Kingdom 2012
Director: Nigel Cole
Certificate 12A 93m 49s

This version of *All in Good Time* has had a long journey to get to cinema screens. The story, about a young newlywed couple who can't consummate their relationship because of the proximity of their intrusive family, began life in 1961 as 'Honeymoon Postponed', an episode of TV's *Armchair Theatre*. Writer Bill Naughton then adapted it into the stage play *All in Good Time*, which Roy Boulting directed in 1966 as *The Family Way*, featuring music by Paul McCartney and set in the play's original Bolton location. Evidently, filmmakers halfway across the world in India found Naughton's story ideal for localisation, and the 1970s saw the release of the unofficial Marathi-language version *Mumbaicha Jawai* and the Hindi-language remake *Piya Ka Ghar*. Most recently, Ayub Khan Din's stage version, retitled *Rafta, Rafta* and set in Bolton's British Asian community, won an Olivier award for best new comedy in 2008.

While it may be difficult for modern audiences brought up in nuclear families to understand how lack of privacy can hamper a young relationship, it's a scenario that will be only too familiar to those who live in joint families. Especially in the Indian versions of Naughton's play, the problem of space is evident, as the young protagonists live as part of a family of five or more in a small one-room tenement, with only a thin curtain providing a semblance of privacy for any amorous activity.

Shooting in a number of locations, Nigel Cole's film opens up Khan Din's play and gives a real sense of the community in which the protagonists live – especially the rabbit warren of narrow streets where the central family home is located and a local Bollywood cinema. Yet Cole also retains the play's confined spaces within the house, creating corridors where people have to squeeze past each other and small bedrooms with paper-thin walls where any sound above a whisper can be heard. The hemmed-in locations are supremely effective in adding to the young couple's mounting frustrations as they desperately try to make love.

As Vina and Atul, Amara Karan and Reece Ritchie make for an engaging if over-earnest couple, and Meera Syal is competent, as always, as Atul's mother Lopa. But it is Harish Patel, reprising his role from the stage play as the paterfamilias, who holds the film together. As the concerned, confused, domineering, whisky-swilling Eeshwar, a thoughtless yet always well-intentioned boor, Patel is the life-force of the film.

Even for those who have seen the myriad adaptations of Naughton's work, Cole's film succeeds as a gentle family comedy, set to an evocative soundtrack combining the melodies of the West with timeless Bollywood songs from the 1970s and a *qawwali* by late Pakistani great Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan.

Naman Ramachandran

CREDITS

Produced by
Andy Harries
Suzanne Mackie
Screenplay
Ayub Khan Din
Based on his play *Rafta Rafta*, based on the play *All in Good Time* by Bill Naughton
Director of Photography
David Higgs
Editor
Michael Parker
Production Designer
Cristina Casali
Music
Niraj Chag
Costume Designer
Natalie Ward

Production Companies
Studio Canal Features and UK Film Council presents a Left Bank Pictures production
A film by Nigel Cole
Executive Producers
Jenny Borgars
Will Clarke
Olivier Courson
Ron Halpern

CAST

Harish Patel
Eeshawr
Reece Ritchie
Atul
Amara Karan
Vina
Meera Syal
Lopa
Neet Mohan
Jay Dutt
Hassani Shapi
Laxman Patel
Shelley King
Auntie Laxmi
Arsher Ali
Etash
Amith Rahman
young Brijesh
Ozzie Yue
Mr Dinesh

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

8,443 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS Bolton, the present. Vina, who is from an affluent family, marries Atul and moves into the home he shares with his parents Eeshwar and Lopa. Atul and Vina are virgins, having decided to consummate their relationship only after their marriage. However, they can't make love on their first night together because of constant interruptions from Eeshwar, who is well meaning but intrusive and often drunk. They hope to have sex during their honeymoon in Goa, but the holiday is cancelled when their tour operator goes bankrupt.

At home, their attempts at lovemaking continue to fail because their bedroom shares a thin wall with that of Atul's parents, and Eeshwar's snoring puts them off. In desperation, Atul books a hotel room for a night, but is unable to perform because of his mental state. Atul and Vina begin to row. Vina confides her problem to her mother, and word gets around that Atul is impotent. When Vina's parents visit Atul's parents to sort matters out, Lopa reveals that Eeshwar had a best friend, Brijesh, who accompanied them on their honeymoon. It becomes apparent that there was some physical intimacy between Brijesh and Lopa, though Eeshwar remains unaware of this.

Vina returns home to her parents following another row with Atul. Eeshwar persuades Atul to woo Vina back. Atul does so, and brings Vina home. The young couple finally consummate their marriage, their cries of passion heard by family and neighbours alike. As the happy couple leave for a honeymoon in Blackpool, Eeshwar realises that Atul bears a strong resemblance to Brijesh.

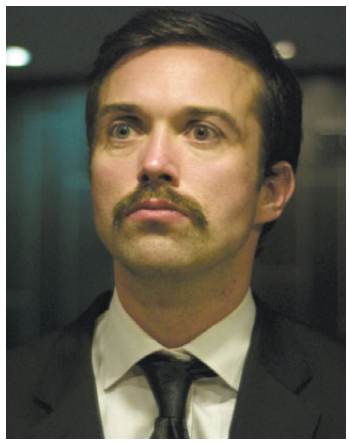
Charlie Casanova

Ireland 2011
Director: Terry McMahon
Certificate 18 93m 59s

You couldn't accuse Emmett Scanlan of a lack of enthusiasm in the role of foul-mouthed, sociopathic Charlie Casanova, a moneyed businessman who takes his wife and friends to a two-day conference at a smart hotel with the express intention of pulling to pieces their already spoiling married lives. On their first night in the hotel bar, Charlie persuades his guests to play a game in which they must draw cards to decide for or against base, nihilistic initiatives such as cheating on their partners or battering strangers in the street.

For all his gusto, Scanlan's boyish looks conspire against him, and his nineteen-to-the-dozen delivery combines with the film's first-person narration to give his performance the feel of the worst kind of self-satisfied amateur theatre. What's more, the premise – simple though it may be – is unconvincing. We need to believe that Charlie's friends are capitulating to his will, not to the cards' dictum, but Scanlan never really persuades us that he's the leader of the pack (it takes more than meanness to inspire this kind of shortsighted obeisance). The problem is compounded by frequent overstatements of Charlie's supposed intellect, and silly self-mythologising statements such as: "I will die as I lived... powerful, audacious, alone." The result is that any character seduced or nettled by Charlie's vaudeville ravings appears moronic, suggestible and, fatally, impossible to sympathise with.

There's no overcoming this obstacle and, unhappily, nothing else here to feed the viewer's imagination. Eoin Macken's crowding, eyeballing camerawork and the low-budget grain of the picture overripen the film's squalid set pieces – such as Una, wife of Charlie's best friend Kevin, letting him into a toilet-cubicle to watch as she inserts a tampon, or Charlie's scourging of the working classes in possibly the most odious stand-up routine ever seen on film. Charlie's Patrick Bateman shtick – "You're not a man, Kevin, you're a ghost, like me" – doesn't work without the counterbalancing laidback direction and inspired synth-pop soundtrack of Mary Harron's *American Psycho* (2000).



Unideal husband: Emmett J. Scanlan

Damien Hannaway is watchable as Kevin, but it's not enough to rescue writer/director/producer Terry McMahon's debut. The final image – a hot iron left to stand on a shirt – encapsulates the experience of watching the film: torturous, making you haywire with waiting for the whole sickly horror-show to smoke and burst into purifying flame.

Thirza Wakefield

CREDITS

Produced by
Terry McMahon
Written by
Terry McMahon
Director of Photography
Eoin C. Macken
Editor
Tony Kearns
Music
Marc Ivan O'Gorman
Sound Designer
Nikki Moss
Costume
Anouck Sablayrolles

©[no company given]
Production Companies
Source Productions presents
A film by Terry McMahon
With the participation of Bord Scannán na hÉireann/The Irish Film Board

CAST

Emmett J. Scanlan
Charlie Barnham, 'Charlie Casanova'
Leigh Arnold
Una
Damien Hannaway
Kevin
Ruth McIntyre
Saoirse
Tony Murphy
Donald
Valeria Bandino
Linda
Johnny Elliott
Jimmy
Anouck Sablayrolles
escort
Glenn McMahon
Officer Mullingar
Thomas Farrell
Mick
Tommy O'Neil
Alan, Charlie's father

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
StudioCanal Limited

8,458 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS Dublin, present day. Charlie Barnham and his wife Soairse attend a weekend business conference along with two couples, Kevin and Una and Donald and Linda. Driving to the shop to fetch cigarette papers on their first night at the hotel, Charlie accidentally hits and kills a pedestrian. Back at the hotel bar, he blames his upset on having had his car stolen; in good spirits again, he institutes a game whereby members of the party draw a card to decide whether or not to accept a dare. At the gym the following morning, Charlie convinces Kevin to sleep with a prostitute, in keeping with the rules of the game. Later that evening, Charlie uses Kevin's absence to proposition Una; on drawing a card, she agrees to sleep with him. The next day, Charlie is questioned by police after his torched car is discovered by the roadside. Smoking a joint on the roof of the hotel with Kevin that evening, he admits to going to bed with Una, then pushes Kevin from the ledge to his death. Charlie feigns grief at the funeral but later confesses to Soairse that he's killed a man and a woman. By the rules of the game, she is sworn to secrecy – but while Charlie undresses in the bathroom she calls the police. Hearing sirens, Charlie makes his escape into the night.

Cosmopolis

Canada/France/
Portugal/Italy 2012
Director: David Cronenberg
Certificate 15 108m 49s

Play FTSE for me: Robert Pattinson

Don DeLillo's novel *Cosmopolis* is a testing read. His sentences seem drained of easily shared emotion as they carve out a language that can adequately describe the leeching of affect from our free-market globalised world and the pain that world inflicts unconscionably. Published in 2003, and widely claimed as a post-9/11 text, the novel now seems astonishingly prescient of the 2008 financial collapse and the online world's approach to reading information trends without scepticism, as if they were runes or entrails. As one has come to expect from David Cronenberg, his film treats the novel as a sacred text and is determined to give us the language served up plainly with minimal expression, almost like recitative in opera.

Most of the early part of financial whizz-kid Eric Packer's day is spent in a stretch limo (which has been "Prousted" – cork lined – and is "safe from penetration") in search of a haircut, while gnomic utterances are batted back and forth aggressively between himself and the procession of his advisers who have to come to the car for one-on-one meetings. "People tell people what they will," Packer says to Torval, his security minder; "Money has its neurotic quality, it talks to itself," his nerd IT genius tells him; "Computers are dying, even the word computer sounds dumb," he tells Vija Kinsky, his theory coach played by Samantha Morton. Her long explanations of what's happening are punctuated with the phrase, "I do not know this." The way that Cronenberg and cinematographer Peter Suschitzky shoot the limo's interior, using the CGI equivalent of clunky, deliberately signalled back-projection, makes a claustrophobia-inducing space in which this rather airless sloganising becomes oppressive. But then we have other penetrations to consider: sex with Didi Fancher, Packer's art dealer – Juliette Binoche delivering the lines beautifully if writhing rather girlishly – while he tries to persuade her to convince the owners of Mark Rothko's chapel to sell it to him, "walls and all"; attacks from protesters wielding dead rats (there's a long conversation about the rat becoming a unit of currency); and a visit from his doctor, who gives him a rectal examination while he flirts with his manager Jane Melman, a single mother who's been out running on her day off but still has to turn up. Some viewers will find these scenes rather arch, since they offer some of the pleasures of a multiplex Friday night but with a built-in deflating commentary.

But then Cronenberg isn't interested in contributing to what the film critiques. Where the novel is more in love with surfaces and the glamour of evil, the film wants to penetrate the psyche of a man of modern appetites, someone who's tasted it all so young and who now thrills to losing it all. Robert Pattinson plays Packer like James Dean playing James Bond, demanding and getting what he wants, which is mostly sex, information and an end to boredom. When his new wife (in an as yet unconsummated marriage) remarks again and again in their casual meetings for meals that she smells sex on him, it's as if he's becoming more human and therefore alien to her. Naturally (and perhaps bankably), for much of the time the camera is almost glued to Pattinson's face. As his wide eyes look increasingly haunted, his girlish lips snarl and snap out the lines with the diminishing conviction of a man losing faith. This is not an easy film to watch because it puts an affect-free world on screen until near its end, when Packer gets to the base of his disorder and emotion is given some rein at last. Cronenberg's *Cosmopolis* is therefore another session on the couch, one that sounds many echoes of the debilitating aspects of the culture around us. It may yet turn out to be a blueprint for things we'd rather avoid but have to face. **Nick James**

SYNOPSIS Young, successful financier Eric Packer takes a stretch limo to get himself a haircut, against the advice of Torval, his chief of security, who warns of an imminent threat. Shiner, Packer's IT genius, visits to convince him that the company systems are impenetrable. Packer has sex with his art dealer Didi Fancher, before discussing buying Rothko's chapel. Seeing his new wife Elise in a taxi, he gets out to breakfast with her. She smells sex on him and declines his offer of sex in a local hotel. Back in the limo, Packer's theory guru Vija Kinsky warns him that the markets are unstable and that he's losing all his money. Meanwhile protesters attack and rock the car, spraying graffiti all over it. A substitute doctor arrives and gives Packer a rectal examination while he flirts with Jane Melman, his office manager, who's sweaty from jogging. Packer has sex in a hotel with security guard Kendra Hays. Finding Elise in a bookshop, Packer has lunch with her. She notices his jacket is missing and says she saw him leaving a hotel. He says he lost it in the protest. Standing outside the limo Packer is attacked by protester André Petrescu, who throws a pie in his face. At the edge of a basketball court, Packer persuades Torval to show him how to use his gun and then shoots him. Elise tells Packer that she'll help him financially but that their marriage is over. He gets the driver to take him to a barbershop run by a friend of his father. With only half his hair done, Packer leaves and is shot at from an old building opposite. Armed himself, he breaks into the building and confronts Benno Levin, a former employee. To prove that he feels things, Packer shoots himself through the hand. Levin helps him staunch the wound and then prepares to execute him.

CREDITS

Produced by
Paulo Branco
Martin Katz
Screenplay
David Cronenberg
Based on the novel by
Don DeLillo
Director of Photography
Peter Suschitzky
Edited by
Ronald Sanders
Production Designer
Arv Grewal
Music
Howard Shore
Sound Mixer
Jean-Paul Mugel
Costume Designer
Denise Cronenberg

©Cosmopolis
Productions Inc./Alfama Films Production/
France 2 Cinéma
Production Companies
Paulo Branco & Martin Katz present an Alfama Films/Prospero Pictures production in co-production with Kinology Films and France 2 Cinéma
Produced with the participation of Téléfilm Canada
In association with Talandracas Pictures
With the participation of France Televisions, Canal+, RAI Cinema, RTP
Produced with the participation of Ontario Media Development Corporation, Astral Media, The Harold Greenburg Fund
Executive Producer
Gregoire Melin
Edouard Carmignac
Renee Tab
Pierre-Ange Le Pogam

CAST

Robert Pattinson
Eric Packer
Juliette Binoche
Didi Fancher
Sarah Gadon
Elise Shiffrin
Mathieu Amalric
André Petrescu
Jay Baruchel
Shiner
Kevin Durand
Torval
K'naan
Sufi rapper
Emily Hampshire
Jane Melman
Samantha Morton
Vija Kinski
Paul Giamatti
Benno Levin
George Touliatos
Anthony

Dolby Digital
In Colour

Distributor
E1 Films

9,793 ft +8 frames

Dark Horse

USA 2011
Director: Todd Solondz

It's a key component of Todd Solondz's creative makeup that he consistently challenges the audience by confronting us with characters who take us out of our moral comfort zone, regaling us with the sexually dysfunctional, sympathetic paedophiles, unsympathetic disabled people, restless ghosts and even pubescent girls who want to get pregnant. His writing is definitely provocative, but it is uneven: at his best (*Happiness*, let's say) he encourages us to consider points of connection with these emotionally damaged individuals in a manner that's troubling yet inclusive, but in his slightly weaker offerings (*Life During Wartime*, for instance) it feels as if the extreme subject-matter is a strong-arm tactic to get a reaction, thus distancing the viewer from the material. The latter film was such a troubled shoot that Solondz threatened it would be his last, yet thankfully he's back again, and on top form, with a feature that's darkly comic yet also very touching.

At its centre is Abe (Jordan Gelber), a significantly sadder version of the manchild comedic type with which Seth Rogen has made his name in recent mainstream fare. Thirtysomething Abe still lives at home, works for his dad's real-estate company, and is really only functional within the cosseting family unit, where his capricious spoilt-child attitude to his spreadsheet duties begins to test his otherwise patient dad (Christopher Walken). Squaring up to the opposite sex reveals Abe's glaring social limitations, with Solondz delivering toe-curling dialogue when the schlubby Abe, driven by an entirely misplaced confidence, proposes marriage to the over-medicated Miranda (Selma Blair), seemingly unaware of her spaced-out detachment from him and pretty much everything else in her life. Alert Solondz-watchers will have picked up that Blair is a returnee from the 'Fiction' segment of 2001's *Storytelling*, where the same character was a creative-writing student (then known as Vi) with an ill-fated taste in men. That she should end up settling for domesticity and putting her literary ambitions on hold makes a certain sense, but whether she or any other woman is a suitable partner for the virtually infantile Abe is the key question that keeps the narrative ticking over. Can he grow up and face the challenges ahead as an adult, or is the family nest simply too comfortable a refuge for him ever to want to leave?

The film certainly doesn't undersell Abe's flaws, but although his haplessness provokes laughter, there's always an air of sympathy in the comedy, an element of warmth that perhaps derives from getting to spend plenty of time with him – for good and ill – since, unlike many previous Solondz pictures, this is much less of an ensemble story and more a single character study. Abe's dad calls it "tough love" when he makes a decision that

Backing the wrong horse: Selma Blair, Jordan Gelber

will turn his son's life upside-down, and this goes for the film itself, which gets a lot of mileage from delving inside Abe's psyche, revealing the doubts, fears and misguided perceptions he's unable to share with others. Where Solondz sometimes gives us characters who feel more like moral diagrams than actual people, here that's not the case, since we're working from the inside out rather than sitting back and pondering the thematic symbolism of the typical Solondz flotsam and jetsam. The trick is accomplished by Abe's visions of frumpy co-worker Marie (Donna Murphy), which allow him essentially to talk to himself, Solondz economically signalling the shift into this interior realm by putting Marie in situations where she normally just wouldn't fit.

Of course, there are some bitter twists of fate in store for Abe (we'd expect nothing less in a Solondz movie), but notwithstanding some slight frustration that his love-interest isn't quite developed to the same degree, the sheer investment Solondz puts into his little-boy-lost protagonist pays dividends in a film that's insightful and compassionate without going soft on us. **Trevor Johnston**

CREDITS

Produced by
Ted Hope
Derrick Tseng
Written by
Todd Solondz
Cinematographer
Andrij Parekh
Editor
Kevin Messman
Production Designer
Alex DiGerlando
Sound Designer
Eric Offin
Costumes Designed by
Kurt and Bart

©Mount Pleasant Pictures Inc.
Production Companies
Goldcrest Films presents a Double Hope production
A film by Todd Solonz
Executive Producers
Nick Quested

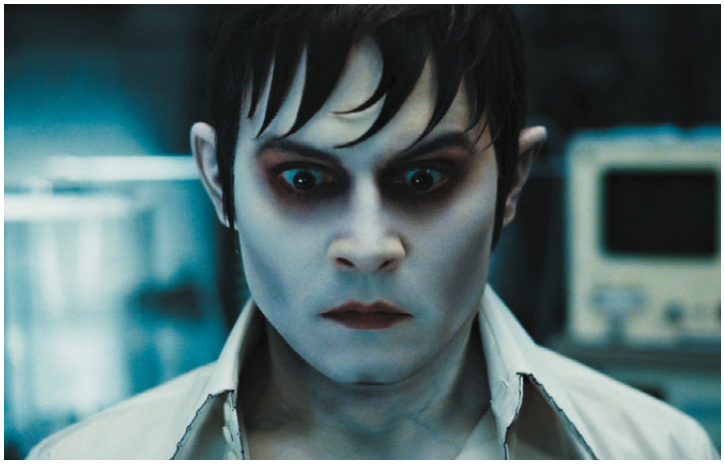
CAST

Justin Bartha
Richard
Selma Blair
Miranda (formerly 'Vi')
Mia Farrow
Phyllis
Jordan Gelber
Abe
Donna Murphy
Marie
Christopher Walken
Jackie
Zachary Booth
Justin
Aasif Mandvi
Mahmoud
Melisa Young
wedding singer
Tyler Maynard
Jiminy
Mary Joy
Lori
Peter McRobbie
Arnie

Distributor
Axiom Films Limited

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

SYNOPSIS US, present day. Abe is an overweight, emotionally immature man in his thirties; he lives with his parents and works for his father's real-estate business. Abe latches on to passive, over-medicated Miranda at a wedding reception, and a week later proposes marriage. As he awaits her answer, we see into Abe's divided soul, where a vision of kindly co-worker Marie expresses the gnawing doubts he can never admit to others. Abe and Miranda's engagement goes ahead, despite Miranda's admission that she has Hepatitis B. After he punches her ex-boyfriend Mahmoud – assuming him to be the source of the virus – Abe's hopes unravel, and he fantasises about an assignation with a sexually voracious Marie. Increasingly exasperated by Abe's workshy attitudes, his father sacks him. Abe drives off in a rage. He imagines visiting a toy store to purchase a fiancée, but later wakes up in hospital to discover that he's been in a coma for four months after crashing his car. He pours out his heart to Miranda, who is cool towards him, since treatment has enabled her to have his child, but she's now with Abe's much-loathed medic sibling Richard. Abe dies from Hepatitis B, and his unquiet spirit visits the now empty family home. A glimpse inside Marie's psyche reveals that she secretly loved him.



Sleepy wallow: Johnny Depp

Dark Shadows

USA 2012
Director: Tim Burton
Certificate 12A 113m 0s

Created and produced by Dan Curtis (fully credited here) but fleshed out by a troupe of writers (shamefully overlooked), *Dark Shadows* was an odd phenomenon even by cult television standards. Debuting in 1966, the daily afternoon soap opera (on the pattern of non-exportable franchises such as *All My Children* or *As the World Turns*) began as gothic romance in the manner of numberless paperback Jane Eyre knock-offs but had a ratings surge when it switched over to gothic horror and unleashed a vampire among the regular cast. Originally a Dracula-like menace, Jonathan Frid's Barnabas Collins became so popular that reasons had to be found for not staking him when his storyline concluded, and so the character became the first tormented, self-hating, romantic vampire. If Anne Rice, Joss Whedon, Stephenie Meyer or *True Blood* mix vampires with soap opera, it's because of the precedent of *Dark Shadows*.

Among the monster-kid baby boomers who rushed home from school for each afternoon's slice of chain-rattling was Tim Burton, who is yet again teamed with a pale-faced, peculiarly coiffed Johnny Depp (attached also to a remake of Curtis's other vampire franchise, *The Night Stalker*) on this big-screen reimagining of the soap as a camp-kitsch charade.

Throughout Burton's career, especially when Depp is on board, the auteur has shown an uncanny ability to co-opt pre-existing material, personalising everything as the story of an awkward goth outsider misunderstood by suburban norms who nevertheless finds love and acceptance with a slightly-too-bland everyday princess. Depp matches Frid's fringe and has a Charles Addams pallor but models his body language on Max Schreck's prissy-ratty Nosferatu – a touchstone vampire performance, already homaged by Klaus Kinski, Nicolas Cage and Willem Dafoe – and flashes talons with scissorhanded elegance. It's a shame the script, co-written by mash-up hack Seth Grahame-Smith (*Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*), gives this inherently amusing Barnabas so little to work with. Even combining two (arguably three) of the show's characters into one, with a backstory as an escaped mental patient amd psychic rejected by uncaring parents, doesn't make Bella Heathcote's love-interest Maggie any less bland; all the heat (including a knockabout sex scene) is between Barnabas and arch-enemy Angelique (Eva Green, with a fabulous broken-eggshell look in

SYNOPSIS Collinsport, Maine, 1776. Wealthy Barnabas Collins rejects his former mistress, servant-turned-witch Angelique, and she curses him. After making his fiancée Josette jump off a cliff, she turns Barnabas into a vampire and has him chained in a coffin and buried.

In 1972, Maggie Evans, Josette's reincarnation, is compelled to seek a position as governess at Collinwood, Barnabas's former mansion. She takes the name Victoria Winters and looks after troubled child David Collins. Workmen unearth Barnabas's coffin and he slaughters them, then returns to his former home and shows his descendant Elizabeth Collins Stoddard a hidden fortune, which persuades her to accept the vampire into the family. Barnabas revives the Collins fish-canning business, which has run down thanks to the machinations of Angelique, who has lived through the centuries to persecute the family and is now a prominent local businesswoman. Rekindling his romance with Maggie-Victoria-Josette, Barnabas seeks a cure for his affliction, but kills Dr Julia Hoffman, David's resident psychiatrist, when he discovers that she's more interested in becoming a vampire herself than in lifting his curse.

Angelique burns down the Collins factory and leads a mob against the mansion, then has a magical battle with Barnabas. Elizabeth's werewolf daughter Carolyn and the ghost of David's mother take the vampire's side in the fight against the witch. Though Angelique is defeated, her power makes Maggie jump off the cliff. This time, Barnabas saves his love by biting her. At the bottom of the sea, where she has been dumped, Dr Hoffman also turns into a vampire.

extremis). Otherwise, the vampire tries to adjust to 1972 – an odd choice of setting, since *Dark Shadows* went off the air a year earlier – in Austin Powers-type man-out-of-time jokes accompanied by a Greatest Hits selection of soundtrack cuts (Curtis Mayfield, The Carpenters).

The *Dark Shadows* TV series carried on boardroom/bedroom plots even as vampires and werewolves abounded, but it's hard to see why so much of this film is about the family fish-canning business. With five years of daily shows, the original had time to highlight every member of the Collins household. Here, it's hard to see why Michelle Pfeiffer's matriarch (a role created by Joan Bennett) is even in the movie, while Burton-friendly presences such as Chloë Grace Moretz (who gets a good climactic 'reveal') and Helena Bonham Carter (clutching a glass of whisky in every scene) have to claw for any attention. With inventive, fondly detailed art direction (the Collins fireplace secret passage is a stunner) and moments of genre-homage glee (a magical duel patterned on the Price-versus-Karloff finale of Roger Corman's *The Raven*), this is studded with things to cherish but also stuck with sub-*Dracula: Dead and Loving It* jokes (a routine built around the word 'balls' is an especial low point). Like so many Burton-Depp films, this evokes great passions – a horror/soap hybrid should be about embracing extremes without shame – but is afraid to take them seriously, and thus feels oddly domesticated and timid when it ought to be barking mad.

Kim Newman

CREDITS

Produced by
Richard D. Zanuck
Graham King
Johnny Depp
Christi Dembrowski
David Kennedy
Written by
Seth Grahame-Smith
Story
John August
Seth Grahame-Smith
Based on the television series created by Dan Curtis
Director of Photography
Bruno Delbonnel
Film Editor
Chris Lebenzon
Production Designer
Rick Heinrichs
Music
Danny Elfman
Production Sound Mixer
Tony Dawe
Costume Designer
Colleen Atwood
Visual Effects
MPC
Method Studios
Vancouver
The Senate
Buf
Mattes and Miniatures

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©Village Roadshow Films (BVI) Limited (all other territories)
Production Companies
Warner Bros. Pictures presents in association with Village Roadshow Pictures an Infinitum Nihil/GK Films/Zanuck Company production
A Tim Burton film
Executive Producers
Chris Lebenzon
Nigel Gostelow
Tim Headington
Bruce Berman

CAST

Johnny Depp
Barnabas Collins
Michelle Pfeiffer
Elizabeth Collins Stoddard
Helena Bonham Carter
Dr Julia Hoffman
Eva Green
Angelique Bouchard
Jackie Earle Haley
Willie Loomis
Jonny Lee Miller
Roger Collins
Bella Heathcote
Victoria Winters/Josette DuPres
Chloë Grace Moretz
Carolyn Stoddard
Gully McGrath
David Collins
Ray Shirley
Mrs Johnson
Christopher Lee
Clarney
Alice Cooper
Alice Cooper

Dolby Digital/ Datasat/SDDS
Colour and Prints by
Technicolor
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Warner Bros Distributors (UK)

10,170 ft + 0 frames

The Dictator

USA 2012
Director: Larry Charles
Certificate 15 83m 12s

The Dictator is an odd proposition: in some ways, it sees Sacha Baron Cohen move closer to the Hollywood mainstream; in other respects, however, it sees his use of stereotypes reach a more troubling level than was the case with films such as *Borat* (2006) and *Brüno* (2009).

The set-up is simple: Baron Cohen plays Aladeen, the dictator of a fictional North African country, Wadiya. When his nuclear programme causes serious concern, he is summoned to the United Nations in New York, where he becomes the victim of a plot by his right-hand man Tahir (Ben Kingsley). Tahir tasks a racist thug played by John C. Reilly with killing Aladeen, but he bungles it, managing only to remove the dictator's trademark beard. Alone and virtually unrecognisable on the streets of New York, Aladeen discovers that he has been replaced by a double, an imbecilic goatherd (also played by Baron Cohen), and the film is about his struggle to return to power.

To call *The Dictator* satire would be extremely generous. Some of Aladeen's eccentricities – the use of an all-female team of bodyguards, the replacing of words in the Wadiyan language with his own name – are drawn from the behaviour of real-life dictators such as Saddam Hussein and Colonel Gadaffi. Yet *The Dictator*'s mockery is devoid of a point: beyond inviting us to laugh at Aladeen's flamboyant abuses of power, the film has nothing to say about them. It is actually funniest when it is at its most simple-minded, such as in the moments when Aladeen tries to come up with false names and pathetically concocts something from the words on nearby signs.

Baron Cohen's humour has always relied on ambiguity: with Ali G, was he laughing at hip-hop culture, or mocking its appropriation by clueless suburban whites? With Borat, was he ridiculing Kazakhstan, or showing how people could be taken in by crude stereotypes? Crucially, *The Dictator* lacks any of the mockumentary features that played such an important role in *Borat*, and the removal of this machinery means that the pretext for the on-the-face-of-it outrageous use of stereotypes is gone. *Borat* could have its stereotypes and eat them, as it were, since (we were told) the alleged butt of the humour wasn't the hapless Borat himself but the credulous Americans willing to accept this image of Kazakhstan. If that apparently sophisticated rationale never quite convinced, then what is the defence in the case of *The Dictator*? Questioned about what has been read as the anti-Muslim message of *The Dictator*, the film's co-writer David Mandel has said: "Technically speaking, the dictator is North African. But he is not Muslim. There is no mention of Muslims, or Muslim humour." It's true that there's no explicit mention of Islam, but does there need to be? Aladeen – whose identifying feature is a voluminous beard – is a misogynistic antisemite who plays a shoot-em-up videogame based on the 1972 Munich Olympic Games; the Israeli team members shout "Oy vey" before they are gunned down. All of the elements of a Muslim stereotype are there; all that is lacking is the explicit identification.

There's a strange disjunction between the crudeness of the stereotypes and the overall feel of the film, which, with its focus on a bewildered outsider in New York, resembles *Coming to America* (1988) or even *Elf* (2003), but stripped of all their charm. *The Dictator* feels like a film aimed at children but weighed down by a whole host of unresolved adult complexes.

Mark Fisher

Leader column: Sacha Baron Cohen

CREDITS

Produced by
Sacha Baron Cohen
Alec Berg
David Mandel
Jeff Schaffer
Anthony Hines
Scott Rudin
Written by
Sacha Baron Cohen
Alec Berg
David Mandel
Jeff Scaffer
Director of Photography
Lawrence Sher
Edited by
Greg Hayden
Eric Kissack
Production Designer
Victor Kempster
Music
Erran Baron Cohen
Supervising Sound **Editor**
Andrew DeCristofaro
Costume Designer
Jeffrey Kurland

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Production Companies
Paramount Pictures presents a Four by Two Films/Berg Mandel
Schaffer/Scott Rudin production
Executive Producers
Peter Baynham
Mari Jo Winkler-Ioffreda
Dan Mazer

CAST

Sacha Baron Cohen
General Admiral Haffaz Aladeen/Efawadh
Anna Faris
Zoey
Ben Kingsley
Tamir
Sayed Badreya
Omar
Michele Berg
Aladeen's mother
Rocky Citron
Baby Aladeen
Liam Campora
Aladeen age 6

[uncredited]
John C. Reilly

Dolby Digital/ Datasat/SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Paramount Pictures UK

7,488 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS The fictional North African country of Wadiya, the present. When concerns are raised about Wadiya's nuclear programme, the country's despotic leader Haffaz Aladeen is summoned to the United Nations in New York. While he is in New York, Aladeen is the victim of a plot orchestrated by his right-hand man Tahir. He is abducted and replaced by his body double, an imbecilic goatherd. But Aladeen escapes from his abductor, who manages only to remove his trademark beard. Meanwhile, at the UN, the double reads a speech prepared by Tahir in which he promises to sign a new constitution to make Wadiya a democracy. Joining the crowds who have massed to protest against his dictatorship, the almost unrecognisable Aladeen befriends Zoey, who runs a health-food cooperative in Brooklyn. Zoey offers Aladeen a job there, but Aladeen doesn't accept. He meets Nadal, a scientist who headed Wadiya's nuclear programme and whom Aladeen believed he had executed. Aladeen returns to Zoey's cooperative when he learns that it's providing catering to the hotel where the double is staying. He begins running the cooperative on authoritarian lines. Zoey discovers his real intentions and refuses to cooperate with him. Aladeen is forced to zip-line across to the hotel room from an adjacent building. He replaces the double and tears up the new constitution. However, it is clear by now that Aladeen has fallen in love with Zoey, and under her influence he agrees that Wadiya will be democratised after all.

The Fairy

France/Belgium 2011
Directors: Dominique Abel, Fiona Gordon, Bruno Romy
Certificate PG 94m 4s

The feather-light *The Fairy* is the third feature by the writer-performer trio of Dominique Abel, Fiona Gordon and Bruno Romy, following *L'Iceberg* (2005) and *Rumba* (2008). As childlike whimsy, *The Fairy* is comparable to 2009's *A Town Called Panic* – one's enjoyment depends on whether you think 93 minutes isn't too long to watch a plotless film essentially about not much apart from its own silliness. In fact *The Fairy* is supremely amusing in its early minutes, but only sporadically funny thereafter.

The film opens with the hero Dom (Abel), a bored hotel receptionist in Le Havre, trying vainly to settle down to a TV dinner without interruption. Of course, the doorbell rings each time he gets comfortable. One visitor is an annoying British tourist with a dog; on being told that pets aren't allowed in the hotel, he leaves, then comes back with a suitcase which barks and scampers. The next visitor is Fiona, the title fairy (Gordon), who's gawky, deadpan and kooky but otherwise refreshingly down-to-earth. She casually gives Dom three wishes, but doesn't charge him for other favours. These include butting him in the tummy when he chokes on a sandwich, and taking him into the sea to dance amid seaweed and clams. When Fiona next appears, she's pregnant and in a mental hospital – which could have heralded some radical break in tone but here is just a way to set up further slapstick, culminating in a frantic car chase up a rear-projected cliff road while Fiona and Dom's smiling newborn threatens to slide off the back of the car.

Although *The Fairy* has plenty of physical comedy, its musical interludes are perhaps the most pleasing, with Abel and Gordon wearing properly solemn expressions as they gyrate and entwine absurdly. There's also a sweetly random moment when a woman rugby player in a bar breaks into song. For viewers seeking a trace of political observation, the characters include a trio of young African men trying to get across the Channel to Britain (they fail) and some clueless police chasing the characters around the streets of Le Havre. At one point, Dom wails about his bruised finger while Fiona endures unassisted childbirth in the background, which might be a caricature of gender politics, or just another gag. The film's opening shots are also striking, framed against the harbour, with the camera following Dom as he cycles in his ragged plastic waterproofs, plagued by an unruly bike chain. It's just a pity that the film doesn't contrive some way to drop him into the drink.

Andrew Osmond

CREDITS

Produced by
Nathanaël Karmitz
Charle Gillibert
Abel & Gordon
[i.e., Dominique Abel, Fiona Gordon]
Director of Photography
Claire Childéric
Editor
Sandrine Deegen
Art Director
Nicolas Girault
Sound
Fred Meert
Hélène Lamy Au Rousseau
Costume Designer
Claire Dubien

©MK2SA, Courage mon amour films, France 3 Cinéma
Production Companies
MK2 and Courage mon amour present in co-production with France 3 Cinéma
With the participation of France Télévisions, Canal+, Cinécinéma, BeTV
With help from Centre du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel de la Communauté Française de Belique et des télédistributeurs wallons
With the participation of La Région Haute-Normandie
In association with BNP Paribas Fortis Film Fund
With the support of the MEDIA Programme of the European Union, Tax Shelter du Governement Fédéral Belge
In association with Cinémage 5, Cinémage 4 Developpment
Script development supported by Région Basse Normandie in partnership with Centre National du Cinéma et de l'image animée
With the participation of BeTV

CAST

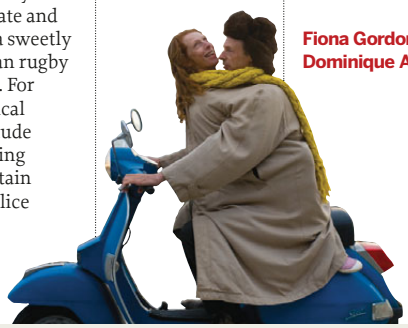
Dominique Abel
Dom
Fiona Gordon
the fairy
Philippe Martz
John the Englishman
Bruno Romy
L'Amour Flou customer
Vladimir Zongo
Destiné M'Bikulu Mayemba
Willson Goma
the three illegal immigrants
Didier Armbruster dit Zata
the flying man
Anaïs Lemarchand
L'Amour Flou singer
Lenny Martz
Jimmy
Emilie Horcholle
shoe seller
Sandrine Morin
nurse

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Verve Pictures Ltd

8,466 ft +9 frames

French/Belgian theatrical title
La Fée



Fiona Gordon, Dominique Abel

SYNOPSIS Le Havre, the present. A woman, Fiona, checks into a hotel and tells bored receptionist Dom that she is a fairy and will grant him three wishes. Minutes later, Dom chokes on a sandwich; Fiona saves him, then asks for his wishes. Dom wishes for a scooter and a lifetime's supply of petrol. Fiona promptly gives him a scooter and a giant industrial tank from which he can take all the petrol he needs. They swim naked in the sea and dance underwater.

Later, Fiona has been captured and put in a mental hospital, where she swells up in moments to become heavily pregnant. She manages to signal to Dom, who smuggles her out of the hospital. On the hotel roof, she gives birth to a boy (presumably Dom's). The new family are pulled into further misadventures, culminating in Dom's petrol tank exploding and Dom, Fiona and the baby being chased off a cliff by police. However, they all survive; after a period in prison, Dom is happily reunited with Fiona and the baby.

Fast Girls

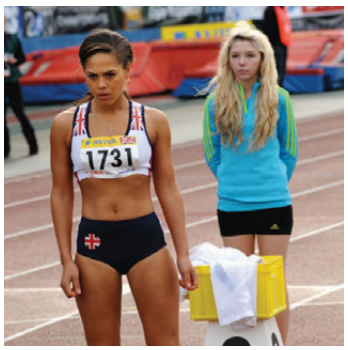
United Kingdom 2012
Director: Regan Hall
12A 90m 48s

It's hard sometimes not to feel that sport is all about selling power, that athletes are admired not for their talent but because of their association with wealth and consumption.

Hitching a ride on this phenomenon is *Fast Girls*, the tale of Shania, a young woman who overcomes her deprived inner-city background through her talent as a sprinter. It's a predictable enough story, and only a slight modulation of the successful narrative formula of filmic predecessors such as *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002). But *Fast Girls*, co-scripted by Noel Clarke, who also wrote *Kidulthood* and *Adulthood*, avoids the traps of commercialism and manages to reclaim athleticism as something admirable for reasons other than the way it looks or the wealth it generates. The four female leads are a refreshing change from the cinematic norm, and Lenora Crichlow in particular is convincing and admirable as Shania, a mix of pig-headed stubbornness and brute determination. Thankfully the film celebrates their athleticism without creating the distance that turns bodies into objects – a particularly impressive feat in a movie about a women's relay team who spend most of the time in skimpy running gear.

It's ironic, then, that *Fast Girls* is the first feature from Regan Hall, a commercials director known for his advertising work for luxury brands. At times, the film betrays Hall's ad background – abundant lens flare and heavy editing transform the otherwise raw sprint scenes into stylishly disjointed sequences. But in the slow-motion sprint shots at a championship event, when all the training comes to fruition and the exasperation mounts, Hall films every muscle and sinew in sharp focus; it's a distinctly uncommercialised view of the female body.

At one point in the film, the four women go on a night out in London's Elephant and Castle, and here Hall constructs a scene that will have many female viewers screeching with glee.



Race cadets: Lenora Crichlow

At a nightclub, the girls are accosted by a troupe of cocksure men, whose sly compliments they rebuff. Annoyed, the men try to intimidate the women; as the scene escalates and a drink is poured over a particularly lecherous man, the women have to make a run for it. It's a brilliant moment: four girls in short skirts and high heels sprinting away from men who're sure they'll catch them but who, unbeknown to them, are chasing the fastest women in Britain.

Basia Lewandowska

CREDITS

Produced by
Damian Jones
Written by
Noel Clarke
Jay Basu
Roy Williams
Director of Photography
John Lynch
Editor
Lewis Albrow
Production Designer
David Bryan
Composer
Richard Canavan
Supervising Sound Designer
Alex Joseph
Costume Designers
Andy Blake
Miss Molly

©Fast Girl Productions Limited and The British Film Institute
Production Companies
BFI and StudioCanal presents in association with Ealing Metro International and Aegis Film Fund
A DJ Films production
Executive Producers
Jenny Borgars
Paul Brett
Graeme Law
Danny Perkins

CAST

Lenora Crichlow
Shania Andrews
Lily James
Lisa Temple
Bradley James
Carl
Lorraine Burroughs
Trix Warren
Rupert Graves
David
Phil Davis
Brian
Lashana Lynch
Belle Newman
Tiana Benjamin
Tara Andrews
Noel Clarke
Tommy

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

8,172ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS London, the present. Shania, a young woman from a rough estate, is a natural sprinter. She qualifies for the World Championships in the 200 metres and is also asked to join the national female relay team. As the team begins training, a feud develops between Shania and fellow sprinter Lisa. The other members of the team, Trix and Belle, watch in frustration as the two women allow their animosity to affect their performance.

At a fundraising event, Lisa chides Shania for drinking excessively before a big race, and Shania storms home. The next morning, she vomits between races and runs a poor time. Admonished by her teammates, Shania quits the team and vows to concentrate on her own race. A few weeks later, she runs into Belle, who invites her on a night out. All four relay runners go dancing, and Shania renews her belief in the team, though she still refuses to rejoin them.

At the world championships, Shania comes fourth in the 200-metre race; Trix succumbs to a sudden injury and pleads with Shania to take her place in the team. Shania agrees, but her feud with Lisa sabotages their qualifying race. Shania can no longer contain her anger and she lashes out at Lisa on the track. She is banned from running. She pleads with Lisa to negotiate her a place on the team again, as Lisa's father is on the athletics board. Lisa does so, and the two women spend a night practising their relay passes in a car park. The team wins a gold medal in the final.

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Aisle be seeing you: Emily Blunt, Jason Segel

The Five-year Engagement

USA/Japan 2012
Director: Nicholas Stoller
Certificate 15 124m 22s

The Five-year Engagement is a comedy about the complexities a couple encounter as they're pulled in different directions by their separate career-oriented lives – lives which quietly demand that professionals, in order to keep up successfully, must act as "small, mobile, independent and intelligent units", to borrow a phrase from Robert Fripp.

The duo here are postdoc academic Violet, played by Emily Blunt, and promising chef Tom, played by Jason Segel, again collaborating with director Nicholas Stoller, who also directed him in *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* (2008) and *Get Him to the Greek* (2010).

Perhaps appropriately for a film that follows an ever-receding save-the-date, *Engagement* meanders through its two hours, a loose collection of rather flabbily edited sketch-like scenes, landing mostly glancing punchlines, with only an occasional moment – "I don't want you to go, I just want to be alone with you here" – that really crawls into Tom and Violet's intimacy, showcasing Segel's particular brand of big-lug vulnerability.

Engagement is produced by Judd Apatow and has the amiably shuffling pace and ingratiating, nice-guy tone that generally distinguish his films. Other than the obligatory out-of-shape naked male shot, however, the gags are tamer than the usual line of Apatow product, based more in the give-and-go of a plausible relationship than ephemeral pop-culture citations (in another five years, fully half of *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*'s laugh lines will need a glossary).

This is not to say there isn't some good lowbrow stuff: Segel, one of comedy's tall men, makes sure to utilise the comic possibilities that his big body provides. He gets in a perfect throwaway pratfall in an icy driveway, as well as a pathetic attempt at parkour when chasing his surprisingly nimble academic nemesis (Rhys Ifans) through snowbound streets. When, losing his professional sense of self, Tom asserts his masculinity by getting deep into hunter-gatherer culture and being eaten alive by muttonchop sideburns, it's a riff on the outdoorsman, Great White Hunter attitudes of Michigan's Upper Peninsula personified by Ted Nugent, and a pretty accurate one.

A host of distinctly drawn bit players familiar from the American TV-and-film comedy pool fill out a cast of eccentrics, including Chris Parnell as a stay-at-home dad who's cultivated hunting and knitting as hobbies; Brian Posehn, with a briar-patch beard, as Tom's pickle-mad deli workmate; Dakota Johnson as Tom's nymphomaniac 23-year-old rebound girl, who gets in a show-stopping breakup monologue; and Mindy Kaling, Randall Park and Kevin Hart as the rest of Violet's postdoc programme, whose lab studies in delayed gratification are here to provide a spoon-feed metaphor for Tom and Violet's relationship. The results of this romantic experiment – "There's no such thing as the right time" etc – will not rock the establishment to its foundations.

Nick Pinkerton

CREDITS

Produced by
Judd Apatow
Nicholas Stoller
Rodney Rothman
Written by
Jason Segel
Nicholas Stoller
Director of Photography
Javier Aguirresarobe
Edited by
William Kerr
Peck Prior
Production Designer
Julie Berghoff
Music
Michael Andrews
Production Sound Mixer
Ken Segal
Costume Designer
Leesa Evans

©Universal Studios
Production Companies
Universal Pictures presents in association with Relativity Media
An Apatow/Stoller Global Solutions production
A Nicholas Stoller film
In association with Dentsu Inc.
Executive Producers
Richard Vane
Jason Segel
Film Extracts
The Notebook (2004)

CAST

Jason Segel
Tom Solomon
Emily Blunt
Violet Barnes
Rhys Ifans
Professor Winton Childs
Chris Pratt
Alex Eilhauer
Alison Brie
Suzie Barnes-Eilhauer
Mindy Kaling
Vaneetha
Kevin Hart
Doug
Brian Posehn
Tarquin
Chris Parnell
Bill
Randall Park
Ming
Lauren Weedman
Sally, chef
Mimi Kennedy
Carol Solomon
David Paymer
Pete Solomon
Dakota Johnson
Audrey

Dolby Digital/ Datasat/SDDS
Colour by
DeLuxe
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures International UK & Eire

11,193 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS San Francisco, the present. Tom, a promising chef, proposes to his English girlfriend Violet, who has recently completed her PhD in psychology. However, Violet's sister beats them to the altar after being accidentally impregnated by Tom's best friend; from this point on, various obstacles prevent Tom and Violet getting married.

Unable to pursue her studies at a local university, Violet is instead offered a post at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Agreeing to postpone the wedding, Tom leaves behind a big career opportunity and follows her to Michigan, where he takes a job at a downmarket deli. While Violet pursues her career dreams – carrying out lab studies in delayed gratification, and growing close to head of department Winton Childs in the process – Tom lets himself become unkempt and unshaven. Increasingly alienated from her aimless fiancé, Violet kisses Childs during a drunken night out. When she confesses this to Tom on the eve of their planned wedding, he breaks off the engagement and has a fling with a co-worker. Returning to San Francisco, he moves in with a younger girlfriend, and Violet moves in with Childs – though Tom and Violet both regret the decision.

Tom and Violet meet up again at the funeral of Violet's last surviving grandparent (there were four present at the announcement of the engagement) and are reconciled. They spend the end of summer in San Francisco together; Violet tells Tom about the surprise wedding that she's arranged.

Friends with Kids

USA 2011
Director: Jennifer Westfeldt
Certificate 15 107m 7s

In *Kissing Jessica Stein* (2001) and *Ira & Abby* (2006), the writer and actress Jennifer Westfeldt explored same-sex relationships and spontaneous engagements in the lives of previously conventional characters. She continues this examination of uncharacteristic behaviour with her directorial debut *Friends with Kids*, a comedy about two friends who decide to have a child together without entering into a romantic relationship. Julie (Westfeldt) and Jason (Adam Scott), both single, reason that children can ruin a marriage – so why not have a kid before you meet The One? Their friends think it's an insane decision, and the script wavers on this front before plumping for a disappointingly safe conclusion.

Its ending aside, *Friends with Kids* is another showcase for Westfeldt's talent for creating convincing characters and razor-sharp dialogue that's rich in contemporary relationship observations. She examines the romantically idealistic, career-driven generation that won't settle for second best, even if it means a life without children, and sets out to explore this quandary by offering an alternative solution while identifying key concerns of modern urban parents. She's on firmer ground with the latter: an early scene in which new parents bicker with each other about banalities is both hilarious and uncomfortably accurate. Another tremendous set piece sees Julie and Jason's friend Ben (Westfeldt's real-life partner Jon Hamm) making a drunken speech at a dinner party in which he rips into each of the guests with withering remarks. One wonders if the titular 'Friends' (as in the TV sitcom) is pure coincidence, given the film's similarly perceptive, affectionate dissection of the lives of close-knit New Yorkers struggling with big life decisions.

Westfeldt's comedy is so competent that the romance at times feels like an unwelcome intrusion. Julie's character is arguably weakened rather than humanised by her crush on Jason, and their will-they-won't-they pairing feels all too familiar. *Friends with Kids* asks us to accept its set-up as a bold detour from convention, but ends up embracing a formulaic romance. The casting is also an issue: while Westfeldt writes and directs well, she isn't as comically versatile or arguably as accessible as her marginalised co-star Kristen Wiig, who took centre stage in last year's *Bridesmaids*. But while it will likely come up a little short in comparison to that comedy hit, *Friends with Kids* is still a superior example of the genre, delivering more than enough sharp lines and dark laughter to ease the passage of its ultimately traditional plotting.

Anna Smith

Family guy: Chris O'Dowd

CREDITS

Produced by
John Hamm
Jennifer Westfeldt
Joshua Astrachan
Jake Kasdan
Riza Aziz
Joey McFarland
Written by
Jennifer Westfeldt
Director of Photography
William Rexer II
Editor
Tara Timpone
Production Designer
Ray Kluga
Music
Marcelo Zarvos
Sound Mixer
Jack Hutson
Costume Designer
Melissa Bruning

©Red Granite Pictures, Inc.
Production Companies
Red Granite Pictures presents a Points West Pictures and Locomotive production
A film by Jennifer Westfeldt
Executive Producers
Mike Nichols
John Sloss
Lucy Barzun Donnelly
Joie Gatta

CAST

Adam Scott
Jason Fryman
Jennifer Westfeldt
Julie Keller
Jon Hamm
Ben
Kristen Wiig
Missy
Maya Rudolph
Leslie
Chris O'Dowd
Alex
Megan Fox
Mary Jane
Edward Burns
Kurt

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

9,640 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS New York, the present. Thirtysomething friends and neighbours Julie and Jason have dinner with two couples, Leslie and Alex and Missy and Ben. Leslie announces her pregnancy.

A few years later, Jason and Julie visit Leslie and Alex with Missy and Ben, who also now have children. Jason and Julie are appalled at their friends' argumentative behaviour. Reasoning that love gets in the way of parenthood, Jason suggests that he and Julie have a child and platonically share parenting duties. Julie agrees, and they have sex; Julie gives birth to a baby boy, Joe. At first Julie and Jason juggle their parenting duties successfully, but Julie develops feelings for Jason just as he finds a new girlfriend, Mary Jane. Julie meets and begins dating divorced father Kurt. When the friends take a skiing holiday together in Vermont, a drunken Ben criticises Jason and Julie's arrangement. Ben and Missy separate. Soon afterwards, Julie invites Jason to her birthday dinner and tells him that she's in love with him. Jason says he doesn't feel the same way. Julie moves out of Manhattan with Joe.

Almost a year later, Jason brings Julie a photo-book as a present and confesses his love; when he tells her that he wants them to be a family, Julie is initially uncomfortable but relents and they make love.

How I Spent My Summer Vacation

USA 2012
Director: Adrian Grünberg
Certificate 15 95m 52s

Twenty-five years on from his first *Lethal Weapon* outing and Mel Gibson continues to put his body on the line in the cause of action cinema. He may be in his mid-fifties but he can still sail through the air in slow motion, catch a hand grenade and hurl it back at the expendable baddies. That *How I Spent My Summer Vacation* isn't even being distributed in American cinemas – it's been relegated to a video-on-demand release – suggests how far his star persona has been damaged by his offscreen outbursts.

Originally titled *Get the Gringo*, this debut feature from Adrian Grunberg (assistant director on Gibson's *Apocalypto*) is more interesting for its *mise en scène* – credit here to Gaspar Noé's regular cinematographer Benoît Debie and production designer Bernardo Trujillo – than for its narrative. Certainly countless disreputable-looking Mexicans have to be gunned down in order to resolve its 'flawed' white hero's oedipal complex. The film's strongest suit turns out to be its principal location, El Pueblito jail (recreated at a disused facility in Vera Cruz, with former inmates filling up the ranks of extras). Here, relatives live alongside armed convicts, and there's an array of thriving businesses in the jail's bazaar-like courtyards, including a 'smack shack' for heroin users. Unfortunately the screenplay, credited to Grunberg, Stacy Perskie and Gibson himself, is wearily predictable: a plucky child seeking revenge on the evil drug dealer who killed his father, a cute yet feisty mother, Gibson playing an ex-army sniper with a sentimental streak, and – just in case the dramatic stakes weren't high enough – a villain who needs a liver transplant, which has to be provided by the very youngster Gibson must rescue.

Complaining about the gratuitous torture sequences or the racist stereotyping in this type of tongue-in-cheek filmmaking is, to quote

Mad Mex: Mel Gibson

Apocalypse Now, akin to handing out speeding tickets in the Indy 500. Yet while Gibson contributes an amusing phone impersonation of Clint Eastwood, the actor's task of reviving his box-office appeal remains herculean. **Tom Dawson**

CREDITS

Produced by
Mel Gibson
Bruce Davey
Stacy Perskie
Written by
Mel Gibson
Stacy Perskie
Adrian Grünberg
Director of Photography
Benoit Debie
Editor
Steven Rosenblum
Production Designer
Bernardo Trujillo
Music Composed by
Antonio Pinto
Supervising Sound Editors
Kami Asgar
Sean McCormack
Costume Designer
Anna Terrazas
Stunt Co-ordinators
USA:
JJ 'Loco' Perry
Mexico:
Balo Bucio

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Production Companies
Icon presents an Icon production
Executive Producers
Mark Gooder
Vicki Christianson
Len Blavatnik
Ann Ruark

CAST

Mel Gibson
Driver
Kevin Hernandez
kid
Daniel Giménez Cacho
Javi
Dolores Heredia
kid's mom
Peter Gerety
embassy guy
Peter Stormare
Frank
Jesús Ochoa
Caracas
Roberto Sosa Martinez
Carnal
Bob Gunton
Thomas Kaufman
Tenoch Huerta
Carlos
Patrick Bauchau
surgeon
Scott Cohen
Frank's lawyer
Dean Norris
Bill

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

Dolby Digital
In Colour
Prints by
Color by DeLuxe
[2.35:1]
Part-subtitled

8,628 ft +0 frames

US VOD title
Get the Gringo

SYNOPSIS Career criminal Driver flees into Mexico after stealing millions of dollars from American mobster Frank. Crashing his vehicle through the border fence, he is arrested by corrupt Mexican officers and sent to the notorious El Pueblito prison in Tijuana. There, Driver befriends ten-year-old Kid and his mother, who are protected in jail by Javi, a drug-cartel boss suffering from a liver disease. The Kid shares Javi's rare blood group and so can provide him with the necessary organ transplant. The Kid has vowed to take revenge on Javi for killing his own dealer father.

Frank sends hitmen into El Pueblito to recover the money stolen by Driver: they are killed by Driver and Javi's footsoldiers. Driver is temporarily released from prison, thanks to Javi's contacts, and heads north to eliminate Frank. Pretending on the phone to be Clint Eastwood, he arranges a business meeting with Frank and his lawyer, during which he disposes of both men. The Mexican government decides to close down El Pueblito, and Javi orders his surgeon and nurse to commence the transplant operation at his own operating theatre within the jail. In the nick of time Driver returns to El Pueblito and in the chaos helps to kill Javi in a shootout. Disguised as a paramedic, he drives away in an ambulance with the Kid and his mother; later they are shown relaxing on a beach.

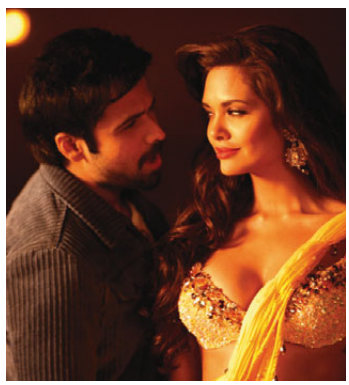
Jannat 2

India 2012
Director: Kunal Deshmukh
Certificate 15 133m 42s

There's been a trend in Bollywood recently to turn away from the usual Mumbai locations and focus instead on the relatively fresh setting of Delhi. Contemporary Delhi-set films such as *Band Baaja Baaraat*, *Dev D* and *Vicky Donor* have all been hits, and Bollywood – never shy of belabouring a successful formula – has made a beeline to India's capital. While the newer parts of the city suffer from the excesses of neo-brutalism, the old areas burst with character, and it's in these teeming bylanes that *Jannat 2*'s hero Sonu Dilli (Emraan Hashmi) plies his trade, selling locally manufactured illegal guns. It's here too that he loses his heart to statuesque doctor Jhanvi (Esha Gupta), though his plans to go straight for her sake depend on him helping brusque cop Raghuvanshi (Randeep Hooda) to bust the local gun mafia.

Jannat 2 is a sequel in name only, though it shares both its star and its director (Kunal Deshmukh) with 2008's *Jannat: In Search of Heaven*. In that film, Hashmi played a bookie involved in match fixing, had a different name and died in a shootout. Yet *Jannat 2* has a familiar feel to it. The plotline bears more than a passing similarity to Andrew Niccol's *Lord of War* (2005), while the bond between Dilli and Raghuvanshi seems like a nod to the honour relationships between the lead characters in John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow* (1986), *The Killer* (1989) and *Hard Boiled* (1992). Raghuvanshi's character is the most familiar: a cop with an axe to grind (he's out to get the gangsters responsible for his wife's death), who finds succour in drink and calls his home phone so that he can listen to his wife's voice on the answering machine. The exact same scenario was played out in *Dum Maaro Dum* (2011), though there it was the drugs mafia instead.

Still, it's tightly plotted and atmospherically shot, and Hashmi phones in yet another shallow but likeable performance. *Jannat 2*, then, is typical of the Vishesh stable: an efficiently crafted and serviceable film that makes no lasting impact. **Naman Ramachandran**



Delhi melée: Hashmi, Gupta

CREDITS

Producer
Mahesh Bhatt
Screenplay
Shagufta Rafique
Director of Photography
Bobby Singh
Editor
Devendra Murdeshwar
Art Director
Pradeep Redij
Background Music
Raju Singh
Sound
Kunal Mehta
Parikshit Lalwani
Costume Designer
Rick Roy

Production Companies
Fox Star Studios
Vishesh Films

CAST

Emraan Hashmi
Sonu Dilli, 'KKC'
Randeep Hooda
ACP Pratap Raghuvanshi
Esha Gupta
Jhanvi Tomar
Manish Choudhary
Mangal Singh Tomar
Sumeet Nijhawan
Sarfaraz
Mohammed Zeeshan Ayyub
Balli
Brijendra Kala
Pratap's right hand
Arif Zakaria
senior police officer
Imran Zahid
Inspector Vijay Thakur
Rohit Pathak
Rajendra
Deepak Kohli
Pankhuri Jain

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)

12,033 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS Delhi, the present. Sonu Dilli is a smalltime peddler of illegal guns. Assistant commissioner of police Pratap Raghuvanshi arrests him but releases him on condition that he become an informer and lead Raghuvanshi to the city's gun-manufacturing mafia. Raghuvanshi is obsessed with eradicating the mafia, which was responsible for his wife's death. Dilli falls in love with neighbourhood doctor Jhanvi, and they marry. Dilli hopes to go straight with Raghuvanshi's help. Dilli and his best friend infiltrate the gun mafia, and Dilli is shocked to discover that the leader of the gang is Mangal Singh Tomar, Jhanvi's estranged father (Jhanvi is unaware that her husband and father are crooks). When the police begin cracking down on Tomar's operations, the gang realise there's an informer in their midst, though they believe it is Dilli's best friend and execute him. A distraught Dilli wants to leave town with Jhanvi but agrees to reveal the location of one last gun deal. Jhanvi finds a cache of guns at home and confronts Dilli; she refuses to believe him when he tells her that he wants to go straight. Tomar has a mole in the police department who reveals that Dilli is the police informer. A shootout ensues and Raghuvanshi and his men raid the gang's den. Raghuvanshi's superior officer arrests Tomar, but releases him surreptitiously – the officer is Tomar's mole. They shoot Dilli; Raghuvanshi shoots Tomar and his superior officer dead. Before dying, Dilli makes Raghuvanshi promise that he'll portray him as a villain to Jhanvi, so that she won't carry a torch for him and will move on to lead a happy life.

Joyful Noise

USA 2012
Director: Todd Graff
Certificate PG 117m 41s

Threading together musical numbers with perfunctory dramatic sequences is a time-honored tradition, but filler normally errs on the side of comedy and romance. Todd Graff's *Joyful Noise* unwisely links songs with an excess of melodramatic arcs, lurchingly unfolding in music-video-length chunks. This pairing of R&B mainstay Queen Latifah and self-mocking country-music icon Dolly Parton starts by giving the audience what it came for: within the first minute, Vi Rose (Latifah) and her perpetual rival G.G. (Parton) are strutting their stuff as small-town gospel-choir stars. G.G.'s husband Bernard (Kris Kristofferson) dies while leading them to victory in a semi-regional competition. When Vi rather than G.G. is appointed to replace him, their longstanding animosity threatens to sabotage the choir's chances of success.

Latifah has executive-producer status, and her screen time is unsurprisingly hefty: Parton barely has five minutes on screen during the first hour, undermining any chance of successfully fleshing out the two divas' rivalry. Their headlining drama gets less time than Vi's daughter Olivia (Keke Palmer) pairing off with Violet's putatively rebellious grandson Randy (Jeremy Jordan, safe and scrubbed as only a young Broadway star can be). Latifah's character is an inflexibly righteous killjoy, leaving viewers wondering why the (ambiguously celibate) young lovers don't rebel a little harder against her obviously unreasonable dictates.

The film toggles between lacklustre musical performances, bloodless contemporary gospel and largely saccharine connecting material, romantic and otherwise. The hastily sketched stories of other choir members place a particular emphasis on the recession – one character and his dad lose their hardware store, though it's a one-shot hardship sorted by a quick pep talk from Latifah – while a subplot about Vi's husband joining the army out of economic desperation barely registers. Similarly ill-advised is an arc covering Vi's Asperger's-afflicted son

Off-key: Queen Latifah, Dolly Parton

Walter (Dexter Darden), who almost instantly assumes normality after Randy teaches him to play T-Pain's 'I'm in Love with a Stripper' on the piano.

The main ideological conflict is between Vi's desire to keep performances staid to glorify the Lord, and a win-for-the-town killer instinct that gives the edge to demonstrably crowd-pleasing secular songs. Hence, Usher's club hook-up celebration 'Yeah!' reworked for Jesus: "I'm in the church with my homies," Randy sings, "trying to get my praise on" – the final manifestation of the film's tone-deaf determination to assimilate and homogenise irreconcilable elements, whether musical or dramatic.

Vadim Rizov

CREDITS

Produced by
Michael Nathanson
Joseph Farrell
Catherine Paura
Broderick Johnson
Andrew A. Kosove
Written by
Todd Graff
Director of Photography
David Boyd
Film Editor
Kathryn Himoff
Production Designer
Jeff Knipp
Music
Mervyn Warren
Sound Mixer
Mary H. Ellis
Costume Designer
Tom Broecker

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Production Companies
Alcon Entertainment presents a Farrell Paura Productions/O.N.C. Entertainment production
Executive Producers
Timothy M. Bourne
Queen Latifah
Shakim Compere

CAST

Queen Latifah
Vi Rose Hill
Dolly Parton
G.G. Sparrow
Keke Palmer
Olivia Hill
Jeremy Jordan
Randy Garrity
Dexter Darden
Walter Hill
Courtney B. Vance
Pastor Dale
Jesse L. Martin
Marcus Hill
Kirk Franklin
Baylor Sykes
Angela Grovey
Earla
Andy Karl
Caleb
DeQuina Moore
Devonne
Kris Kristofferson
Bernard Sparrow

Dolby/Datasat/SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Warner Bros Distributors (UK)

10,591 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS Pacashau, Georgia, the present. After her husband Bernard dies while leading the church's gospel choir to victory in a semi-regional competition, G.G. is surprised when longtime rival Vi Rose Hill is appointed as the new leader of the choir. G.G.'s troubled grandson Randy comes to live with her and falls in love with Vi's daughter Olivia. Despite Vi's scepticism, Randy proves a valuable addition to the choir. Vi insists that the choir stick to traditional arrangements, and as a result they lose to rivals from Detroit in the regional finals. To cheer Olivia up, Randy drives her to see her military father at a far-off base. Vi forbids her daughter to see Randy again.

Behind Vi's back, the choir work with Randy to liven up their material. The Detroit choir lose their championship status when it's revealed they used professional musicians, and the Pacashau choir prepare for the national championships in Los Angeles. Though the pastor initially forbids them from using new material, he gives in when Randy obtains minister status through an online application and threatens to sponsor the choir instead. Vi's ensemble gives a triumphant performance.

A year later, Randy and Olivia are still together when Vi's estranged husband returns home.

Killer Joe

USA 2011
Director: William Friedkin
Certificate 18 102m 13s

Decades after his Hollywood heyday, William Friedkin deserves credit for unlikely self-reinvention as a theatrical miniaturist. *Killer Joe* is his second adaptation of a play by Tracy Letts, following 2006's *Bug*. Awkwardly overstated as *Bug* was, it at least had sheer oddity going for it, and the trump card of a then barely known Michael Shannon, revealed in all his strangeness in a paranoid *folie à deux* opposite Ashley Judd.

An earlier Letts play, *Killer Joe* lacks *Bug*'s claustrophobic concentration, and inhabits more familiar territory. Its story of cluelessly venal trailer-trash tangling with a sexually menacing ambassador of death is pitched between Jim Thompson and Tennessee Williams, with a hit-gone-wrong premise that might once have suited a knowing genre operator like John Dahl. Watching Friedkin's film, you can imagine the play working on stage as knowing meta-pulp with echoes of Jacobean tragedy and Sam Shepard. As a Friedkin film, however, *Killer Joe* doesn't sufficiently distance itself from its genre premise to come across as more than a brassily executed pulp thriller with pretensions.

Friedkin doesn't so much open the play out – it's still very interior-bound – as dress it up with non-essential trimmings. The sequence in which Emile Hirsch's Chris flees his creditors only to be cornered by the disarmingly affable Digger (Marc Macaulay, winningly creepy) is distractingly pumped up with motorcycle action. The touch that most jarringly tells us we're watching a proper movie with proper production values is a fleeting glimpse of a bright yellow Corvette, which so insistently jumps out of the screen that we know it's bound to trigger a key revelation later on.

It's hard to guess whether Letts's original in any way ironises its unusually stark virgin/whore dichotomy – but Friedkin seems openly to relish it. It's established that Chris's mother Adele, briefly glimpsed as a corpse, pretty much deserves her fate (Chris's sister Dottie claims she tried to kill her as a child), while stepmother Sharla is identified as monstrous from the start, marked as slutty and grotesque from the moment Gina Gershon, naked from the waist down, opens her trailer door, revealing a bush that's a token of horror and comedy for all around her: Chris wails, "I don't want Dottie looking at her own stepmother's pussy." While the film celebrates Dottie's sexuality as youthfully authentic, Sharla (duplicitous, tarty and, worst of all, middle-aged) is horribly punished in the final scene, both brutalised and forced to simulate a blowjob using a piece of fried chicken as a prop. (KFC was served to unsuspecting press as an 'ironic' pre-screening snack, which just shows the casual contempt with which critics are

Abode to perdition: Emile Hirsch, Matthew McConaughey

regarded by the industry these days.)

Dottie, meanwhile – whose presumed virginity is a matter of fascination to both her brother and her father Ansel – is an unearthly child-woman, her innocence running in tandem with murderous thoughts and a fascination with martial arts. The film's dramatic turn hinges on Dottie coming to own her sexuality, which is initially a token of exchange between adults: she's pimped to hitman Joe as part of his fee for doing away with Adele. Few performers could have embodied Dottie as imaginatively effectively as Juno Temple, who – as she proved in Gregg Araki's *Kaboom* (2010) – has a rare talent for coming across as playful and intensely weird, often while unflappably naked.

Histrionic rather than truly theatrical, in a way that might interestingly blur borders between screen and stage, *Killer Joe* sees Friedkin most at home when turning the volume up, whether in the climactic grand guignol (including assault with pumpkin can), the repetitive dark-stormy-night atmospherics, or the stagey performance style elicited in particular from a shouty Hirsch. Among the other actors, Thomas Haden Church is solid, giving the goat-like Ansel some vulnerability, although Gershon doesn't have much scope to flesh out her cartoonish character. But the film is a surprisingly effective showcase for Matthew McConaughey. Stately and lizard-like, recalling a younger Robert Duvall, McConaughey doesn't quite redeem the early 'new Brando' kudos squandered through all those popcorn movies, but he does make Joe a disturbing embodiment of *lex talionis*, and something more: confused and disarmed by Dottie, and presiding over a grimly parodic family dinner ("Who would like to say grace?"), his Joe is a decidedly domestic Satan, the devil this clan deserve. **Jonathan Romney**

CREDITS

Produced by
Nicolas Chartier
Scott Einbinder
Screenplay
Tracy Letts
Based on his play
Director of Photography
Caleb Deschanel
Edited by
Darrin Navarro
Production Designer
Franco-Giacomo Carbone
Music
Tyler Bates

Sound Designer
Steve Boeddeker
Costume Designer
Peggy Schnitzer

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Production Companies
Voltage Pictures presents in association with Worldview Entertainment and Picture Perfect Corporation a Voltage Pictures/Ana Media production
A Killer Joe Productions, LLC production

Executive Producers
Christopher Woodrow
Molly Conners
Vicki Cherkas
Zev Foreman
Roman Vlaris

CAST

Matthew McConaughey
Killer Joe Cooper
Emile Hirsch
Chris Smith
Juno Temple
Dottie Smith
Gina Gershon
Sharla Smith
Thomas Haden Church
Ansel Smith
Marc Macaulay
Digger Soames

In Colour

Distributor
E1 Films

9,199ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS Dallas, Texas, the present. Chris Smith arrives at the trailer home of his father Ansel, sister Dottie and stepmother Sharla. In debt to gangster Digger, he proposes a scheme to Ansel: they will hire local detective/hitman Joe Cooper to kill Chris's mother Adele, Ansel's ex, then collect her life insurance, of which Dottie is the beneficiary. Joe accepts the job but insists that Dottie be included in the deal as his 'retainer'. Following a dinner date and sex with Dottie, Joe effectively moves in with the family as her lover. Adele is found killed, but Ansel and Chris have been scammed by Adele's boyfriend Rex – the real insurance beneficiary – in league with Sharla, his lover. Following a bloody confrontation between Joe and the family, Dottie shoots Ansel, then tells Joe she is pregnant, before aiming her gun at him.

Norway out: Benjamin Helstad

King of Devil's Island

Norway/Poland/ France/Sweden 2010
Director: Marius Holst
Certificate 12A 116m 28s

Despite its English-language title, Marius Holst's period movie has nothing to do with the notorious French penal colony off French Guiana where Captain Dreyfus was interned (and where Franklin Schaffner's *Papillon* was set). The venue here is Bastøy, a small island in the Oslofjord, Norway, where in 1900 a correctional facility for 'maladjusted boys' was set up. It was closed in 1953, but has since reopened as a minimum-security jail run on humane lines. The film is based on a real-life riot on Bastøy in 1915, sparked (as in the film) by incidents of sexual abuse by the staff.

Holst (best known here for the 2001 domestic-set thriller *Dragonflies*) and his cinematographer John Andreas Andersen shoot in a cold, blue-tinged register which emphasises the island's wintry isolation as well as the pinched Lutheran morality that pervades the institution. Erling, the film's chief rebel figure, is told on arrival that Bastøy is designed to turn him into "an honourable, humble, useful Christian boy". Predictably it does nothing of the sort, its punitive ethos – and the hypocrisy of the authorities who preach these pieties – only serving to deepen his resentment and strengthen his resolve to escape. His angry defiance infects hitherto model inmate Olav, whose previous good behaviour is about to earn him release, and it's the developing relationship between the two, each taking on something of the other's contrasted traits, that forms the backbone of the action.

As in most prison movies, the authority figures are largely despicable, though Stellan Skarsgård brings an underlying sadness to his role as the island's governor that fleshes out an otherwise one-dimensional part. (The almost wordless role of his wife, a much younger and evidently discontented woman, hints at his emotional

SYNOPSIS Bastøy Island, off the Norwegian coast, 1915. Two new inmates arrive at the island's reformatory for 'maladjusted boys': Erling, a 17-year-old ex-whaling sailor rumoured to have killed somebody, and the younger and more vulnerable Ivar. They're assigned to dormitory C, whose housefather Bråthen tells dorm head Olav to keep an eye on Erling, reminding Olav that he's shortly due for release. Erling is given an introductory lecture by the governor. Determined to escape, he finds his way to a padlocked boathouse, but is caught and thrashed on his hands.

Olav, realising that Erling is illiterate, reads him a letter that Erling has received from a girl (we later learn that the sender was his sister). Under pretext of coaching him to sing for a forthcoming governing committee visit, Bråthen starts taking Ivar away in private. To escape Bråthen's attentions, Ivar slashes his hand while on forest duty; Erling takes him to the surgery and steals the keys to the boathouse. He succeeds in getting away from the island but is captured, brought back and sentenced to a public flogging. The governor orders Olav to carry out the punishment.

At Erling's urging, Olav reports Bråthen's abuse of Ivar to the governor, but the governor slaps him. Ivar drowns himself. The governor pretends it was an escape attempt but tells Bråthen he must leave. Bråthen threatens to report the governor for embezzlement. Seeing Bråthen depart, the boys cheer and jeer, but it transpires he's merely been sent to the mainland during the committee's visit. When he returns, Erling and Olav attack him. They're confined in iron cages, but with the help of Bjarne, an ex-inmate now employed as a menial, they manage to escape. A riot breaks out. The governor is driven off the island; Erling saves Bråthen from being hanged by the boys. As the boys prepare to escape by boat, a warship appears full of armed troops. Everyone is rounded up except Erling and Olav, who set out across the frozen fjord. Erling falls through the ice, and Olav can't save him. He makes his escape alone.

problems.) Elsewhere the film hits most of the expected generic plot points – the vulnerable youngster, the fight in the washroom, the escape attempt, the brutal punishments, the riot – but they're presented with a clearsighted immediacy that makes them seem fresh. The initial process of dehumanisation – on arrival at Bastøy, Erling and the younger, fragile Ivar are stripped of their names, their clothes and their hair, told never to discuss their backgrounds and sent naked as inmates C19 and C5 to run the gauntlet of the other boys – is shown without sensationalism but with no disguising its cold callousness.

Some points are overworked. The tale Erling tells Olav, of the whale that despite being wounded by multiple harpoons refused to give up and die, is a clear metaphor for Erling himself, all the more obvious for its repetition. But other implications are left for us to deduce. Norway remained neutral in WW1, but the date makes you wonder whether the state's massive overreaction to the Bastøy riots – a warship and what looks like a whole regiment of armed troops against a handful of youngsters – might not have been a response to the violence engulfing Europe. Or indeed, as reflecting the insecurity of a country that had only been in independent existence for ten years.

Philip Kemp

CREDITS

Producer
Karin Julsrud
Screenplay
Dennis Magnusson
Based on the story by
Lars Saabye Christensen, Mette Marit Bølstad
Screenplay Revised by
Eric Schmid
Director of Photography
John Andreas Andersen
Editor
Michal Leszczyloweski
Production Designer
Janusz Sosnowski
Music
Johan Söderqvist
Sound Designer
Tormod Ringnes
Costume Designer
Katja Watkins

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With support from Norsk Filminstitutt, Eurimages, Nordisk Film & TV Fond, Polish Film Institute, Swedish Film Institute, MEDIA Programme of the European Union with the participation of Centre national du cinema et de l'image animée a film by Marius Holst
Executive Producers
Lars Hellebust
Vibeke Windeløv
Pias Semb
Stellan Skarsgård
Edward A. Dreyer
Turid Øversveen
Pål Sletaune
Aagot Skeldjal
Håkon Øverås
Karin Julsrud
Marius Holst

CAST

Benjamin Helstad
Erling
Trond Nilssen
Olav
Stellan Skarsgård
Håkon, manager
Kristoffer Joner
Bråthen
Magnus Langlete
Ivar
Morten Strøm
Øystein
Daniel Berg
Johan
Odin Gineson Brøderud
Axel
Markus Brustad
Jan
Agnar Jeger Holst
Arne
Tommy Jakob Håland
Terje
Richard Safin
Erik
Frank-Thomas H. Andersen
Bjarne, farmboy

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Arrow Film Distributors Ltd

10,482 ft +0 frames

Norwegian theatrical title
Kongen av Bastøy
Onscreen English title
The King of Devil's Island

Kosmos

Turkey/Bulgaria 2009
Director: Reha Erdem
Certificate 12A 122m 4s

Kosmos is our Film of the Month and is reviewed on page 52

CREDITS

Producer
Ömer Atay
Screenplay
Reha Erdem
Director of Photography
Florent Herry
Editor
Reha Erdem
Art Director
Ömer Atay
Sound Design
Hervé Guyader
Reha Erdem
Costume Designer
Mehtap Tunay

©Atlantik Film
Production Company
Ömer Atay presents with valuable contributions from Namik Koçer, Naim Koçer, Enric Falgas Arla, Mehmet Betil'in and Bulgarian National Film Center an Atlantik Film, Imaj, Kaboal Pictures, Hundek Isik co-production

Executive Producer
Ömer Atay

CAST

Sermet Yesil
Kosmos
Türkü Turan
Neptün
Hakan Altuntas
Yahya
Sabahat Doganyılmaz
teacher
Korel Kubilay
Baldiz
Akın Anlı
Ilhan
Sencar Sagdiç
Tahir
Cüneyt Valaz
captain
Serkan Keskin
coffee stall

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Verve Pictures Ltd

10,985 ft +11 frames

SYNOPSIS A long-haired stranger appears out of the snowy landscape bordering a rural community in Turkey and rescues a boy from drowning in the river. He revives the child by screaming into his mouth, but the effort leaves him spent on the ground, watched by the boy's grateful mother. Her father Yahya treats the stranger to tea in a local café and hopes he'll stay in the town, which is subject to constant firing noise from military manoeuvres nearby. The new arrival is a rather mercurial guest, spouting a string of gnomic utterances, coming and going without warning, and seemingly existing on tea and sugar lumps. He seems connected at some essential level to the single mother whose boy he saved. Communicating through animal yelps, he calls himself "Kosmos" and she calls herself "Neptün".

As their chaste courtship proceeds intermittently, he also finds time to bed a melancholy middle-aged teacher and steal the painkillers that the town pharmacy refuses to give to the ailing mother-in-law of the area's military commander. Kosmos is suspected of the wave of robberies in the previously crime-free community, but after he cures an ailing tailor and enables a mute boy to speak again, word of his healing powers gets out. The sick and infirm seek his help, though he largely avoids them, and visits the site of a crashed satellite.

When the seemingly cured child dies from a mystery illness, however, the town closes ranks and Kosmos becomes a hunted man. Neptün helps him escape and he heads out into the country once more.

The Last Projectionist

United Kingdom 2011
Director: Tom Lawes
Certificate 12A 80m 32s

This engaging documentary about the Electric, the Birmingham cinema whose hundred-year span forms a microcosm of the history of British independent cinemas, is an elegy for a vanished age which also musters a jaunty optimism for the digital future. It's a work of heart – warm, well researched, and proudly rambling due to its disinclination to trim anecdotes or pass up a chance to wonder at length at a handmade model of the Odeon New Street "with 2,000 tipping seats".

Director Tom Lawes, who bought the cinema in 2005, concentrates usefully on the lived experience of the Electric's audiences and staff to illuminate its various incarnations, starting with his step-grandmother Edna's unvarnished views of the hard chairs and dim gaslight of its first life as a silent cinema. Shaping the flood of reminiscence, however, are solid historical explanations of the Cinematograph Act of 1909, the growth of newsreel cinema in the 1930s (with wonderful archive footage of the cinema being plushly relaunched as the Tatler) and the homegrown sex-film boom of the 1970s. The lion's share of memories is contributed by a set of retired projectionists snug around a pub table, rehashing everything from grumbles about the eternally low pay to memories of dashing to the airport for urgent newsreel inserts. So what gets woven in with the cinema's history is a fond homage to the projectionist's craft, right from the film projector lovingly laced up, reels running, under the opening credits.

Not that it's all *nostalgie de la* booth. A potentially dry list of the persistent bugbears of the small cinema circuit – dreary British quota films, barring clauses that delayed lucrative titles, the exorbitant terms for box-office splits ("The first week of *Grease*, they were 95 per cent of the takings") leap to life in their retelling – as does a sly account of how a city councillor closed his eyes for key sections of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* but still went on to ban it. These tales underline how unabashedly local the film is in its emphasis, chock-full of telling details, such as the fact that the Tatler owed much of its business to New Street train passengers killing time and to parents using its cartoon shows as a child-minding service.

Formally, *The Last Projectionist* makes a positive feature of its necessarily episodic quality, with Lawes creating a succession of original musical themes and commissioning animated inserts, drawing on the styles of each era. Though it's at pains to mark itself out as a film by eschewing TV-style voiceover, it dips momentarily into the derelict-to-grand-design televisual trope when tracing Lawes's five-year restoration of the building. And having reached the present day, its cheerfully inclusive editorial policy starts to hiccup slightly; veteran projectionist Graham Lee's thoughts on working with IMAX 3D, though fascinating, feel outside the film's core remit. Only beer-fuelled bickering from the projectionists about digital projection (one or two embracing the brave new world and its image quality) pulls the film back into focus.

Lawes's own take on the future for independent cinemas in a world of ubiquitous media is determinedly upbeat, talking up the snacks-sofas-and-selective-programming offering in interviews with other cinema owners. His is a cinephilic vision of the future, where everything has to change in order that it may stay the same. Yet the film could have benefited from some wider views on whether digital versatility might return the cinema to its earliest heterogeneity. Perhaps the live satellite broadcasts of opera from the Met, and National Theatre hits, are just the first wave of a new mixed-entertainment era for independent cinemas?

Kate Stables

CREDITS

Produced by
Tom Lawes
Shot by
Tom Lawes
Cut by
Tom Lawes
Production Sound
Nick Hawes

©Tom Lawes/Electric Flix
Production Company
Electric Flix presents

In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
E.C. Birmingham Ltd.

7,248 ft + 0 frames

SYNOPSIS A documentary about the history of Birmingham's Electric Cinema. Built in 1909 to show silent films, it was converted to a plush newsreel and cartoon cinema, the Tatler, in 1937. A group of projectionists reminisce about low pay and about sharing newsreels between cinemas; the cinema's mobile film unit shot local news items for inclusion. Patrons recall the cartoon programmes. The projectionists discuss the quota system, local-authority censorship and tough distribution terms for independent cinemas.

In the 1970s the cinema became an adult-film venue, the Jacey, and then in the 1980s a two-screen cinema showing adult and family films simultaneously. Former managers recall the challenges of running it as an adult venue, and as an underfunded arthouse in the 1990s.

Tom Lawes bought the near-derelict cinema in 2005 and the film details its refurbishment and rebirth. The projectionists hotly debate the switch to digital prints, and IMAX projectionist Graham Lee opines on 3D formats. Finally, current independent cinema operators discuss what independent cinemas can offer that is unique to them.

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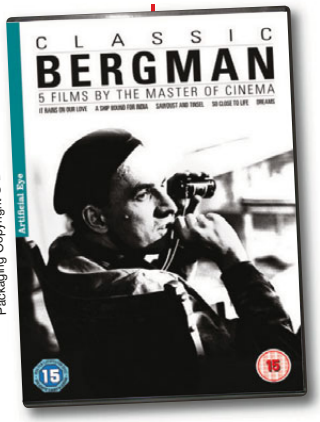

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£10

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released 28/05/12
£10

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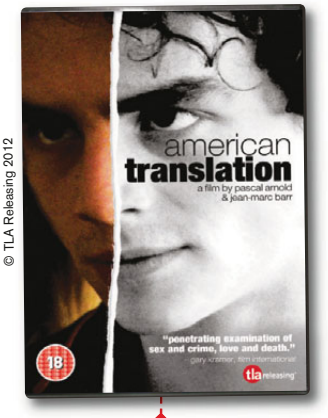

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american translation
subtitled/french
released 14/05/12
£10

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● Released on DVD
23 July

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● Released on DVD and Blu-ray
6 August

Malgorzata Szumowska
Elles

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● Released on DVD and Blu-ray
20 August

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Late September

United Kingdom 2009
Director: Jon Sanders

Late September could easily be the title of an Ozu movie. That isn't the only similarity; like the Japanese master, director Jon Sanders favours long contemplative takes from a fixed camera position – there are only 32 shots in the whole film, and camera movement is restricted to the occasional pan or tilt. And, again like Ozu, Sanders will often stay watching an unpeopled scene after the actors have exited the frame, as if gauging the after-ripples of their emotions.

Other elements of the film suggest parallels with Joanna Hogg. As in *Unrelated* (2007) and *Archipelago* (2010), we're dropped among a bunch of middle-class characters, interlinked by family or friendship, and as emotions bubble up from below the civilised surface, we're left, like belated guests, to work out for ourselves quite how they fit in with each other and how the crosscurrents affect them. In the case of *Late September*, crucial bits of information are withheld until quite late on, or dropped into a casual aside. Initially it seems as though Annie, staying in the rambling old Kent farmhouse where the action takes place, may be the daughter of the main couple, Ken and Gillian, though it eventually transpires she isn't. And only halfway through the film do we learn Ken's name.

This doesn't come across as a fault. As in his two previous features, *Painted Angels* (1998), set in a 19th-century Midwest brothel, and *Low Tide* (2008), about a woman dying of cancer, Sanders is using his minimal exposition and measured pacing to draw us in and keep us alert for revealing glances and seemingly offhand remarks. There's a limpid clarity to his filmmaking that feels natural, the scenes starting and ending where they need to.

As in all his films so far, Sanders devised the narrative structure of the film in tandem with Anna Mottram, who plays Gillian, but the dialogue is improvised by the actors, with all the naturalism (hesitations, stumbling, overlapping speeches) that the technique implies. The focus, unfashionably enough, is on the older members of the cast; the younger people – Ken and Gillian's son Max, his friend Maria, Rosie's piano-playing toyboy Donald – scarcely figure, though we learn that Max recently broke up with his girlfriend. In this, he links in with the film's overall theme, of the breaking-up or souring of relationships, what people can or can't put up with in the name of companionship or just avoiding loneliness. Annie is in the middle of an acrimonious split; Rosie's husband has died; and from what little we learn of it, the affair some years ago between the self-deprecating, lugubrious Jim and Gillian's old friend Flic ended soon and badly.

Ken and Gillian, after years of putting up with "each other's habitual patterns", are heading for rupture, each locked into escalating and mutually antagonistic behaviour: her compulsion to control, his brutal rejection of her emotional needs ("Say something nice," she begs him, "just one word." "Beer," he responds). But finally the most tragic figure is Jim, who at first seems like the buffoon of the party. After his post-coital rejection by Annie, our last sight of him is drifting solitary and dejected in his small sailing boat, nerving himself (it's implied) for suicide. It's typical of the understated irony of Sanders's film that this desolate scene is set against a blue-pink dawn of tranquil beauty.

Philip Kemp

CREDITS

Story Devised by
Anna Mottram
Jon Sanders
All dialogue improvised on set by the actors
Director of Photography
Jeff Baynes
Editor
Nse Asuquo
Music Composed by
Douglas Finch
Sound Recordist
Laura Fairbanks

©Jon Sanders

CAST

Anna Mottram
Gillian
Richard Vanstone
Ken
Bob Goody
Jim
Charlotte Palmer
Annie
Emma Garden
Rosie
Jan Chappell
Flic
Sam Woodward
Max
Seonaid Goody
Maria
Douglas Finch
Donald

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Late September Films

SYNOPSIS Kent, present day. Ken and Gillian, a couple in their sixties, live in an old house near the coast. They've been married some 40 years but are increasingly getting on each other's nerves. It's Ken's 65th birthday. Their younger friend Annie, who's staying with them, recently split with her partner of ten years. Gillian's old friend Flic arrives to stay over for Ken's birthday party. Another old friend, Rosie, arrives; she lost her husband two years ago, and is now with Donald, a much younger man. Ken and Gillian's son Max, who recently broke up with his girlfriend Sarah, arrives with his friend Maria. Ken and Gillian quarrel again.

In the evening, Ken's old friend Jim shows up for the party; he and Flic had a brief affair five years earlier. Max and Maria stage a puppet show for Ken, the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, with Donald accompanying on the piano. Jim makes a speech about how Ken and Gillian still adore each other; Gillian rushes out. Ken finds her in the garden. When she tells him she wants a divorce, he yells at her to shut up and storms off. Jim invites Annie out to look at his boat; after having sex, she tells him she's not interested in anything further. When Annie comes back in, Gillian berates her for what she's done. Annie tells her to mind her own business.

As dawn breaks, Jim drifts glumly in his boat. Next morning, Ken, Gillian and Flic discuss how his body will eventually wash up somewhere, while Annie sits silently.

Lawrence of Belgravia

United Kingdom 2011
Director: Paul Kelly
Certificate 15 85m 37s

By turns funny and bleak, *Lawrence of Belgravia* is a finally moving portrait of an artist who has combined an unabashed but theoretical desire to achieve fame with an eccentric kind of integrity that has kept success out of reach. Lawrence (he doesn't use a surname) founded his first band Felt in 1979, but failed to capitalise on their 1985 indie hit 'Primitive Painters', and when he returned it was in the guise of fake comeback glam-rock band Denim, which acted "as if the 1980s never happened". Sharing a retro sensibility with bands such as Saint Etienne and Pulp, Denim were conscripted by the music press into the Britpop movement in its early and arty phase; but Lawrence's avowed ambition – "I'll make a million: my generation's slow" – went unfulfilled. Their second album, *Denim on Ice*, led off with 'The Great Pub Rock Revival', an attack on what Britpop had become by 1996 that didn't catch the public imagination in the way the likes of Ocean Colour Scene apparently did.

Paul Kelly's film joins Lawrence in 2005, around the time of the release of *Tearing up the Album Charts*, his second album as Go Kart Mozart, and leaves him in 2011 on the completion of its follow-up, *On the Hot Dog Streets*. He lives hand-to-mouth in temporary accommodation – initially in Belgravia – and contends with mental-health and drug problems. Though the recording of the new long-player – and for Lawrence a record doesn't really exist unless it's on vinyl – provides the film with a frame, there isn't much direction within it, and nor are the histories of Lawrence's bands explored in depth.

Instead, *Lawrence of Belgravia* is a character study in the present tense, partly realised through Kelly's cityscapes, rather less romantic here than in his Saint Etienne film *Finisterre* (2003) – and appropriately so, given the tenor of Lawrence tracks such as 'City Centre'. Lawrence's current band dominates the soundtrack, but Kelly's use of Denim's brilliant, nostalgia-skewering 'The Osmonds', over shots of Lawrence's Birmingham, stands out. Information about the past comes through indirectly, as in a quick montage of press cuttings and posters in which we see that at one point in the 1980s Felt were billed above Primal Scream, or when Lawrence reads an article about the band, probably based

The long and winding road: Lawrence

on an interview with its gifted guitarist Maurice Deebank, alternately scoffing and reminiscing. Then again, much about the present is conveyed quite obliquely too, as in an echoing montage of threatening letters from various social-care and housing authorities. A voicemail lets Kelly know that his quarry is in hospital for reasons undisclosed.

Though "completely obsessed with being famous" and convinced that his music is highly commercial – he affects bafflement at the idea of internet journalists writing for free – Lawrence is unwilling to make concessions even to his devotees. Early on he recounts telling a Parisian concert promoter that under no circumstances would he play any Denim songs; later he tells Kelly that unlike every other band with surviving members and the slightest claim on posterity, he will never reform Felt ("I wouldn't do it: I'm stronger than Lou Reed"). Of course, this self-denial only burnishes his cult laurels, but there comes a point when even the cultists can see that the myth is sustaining an unhappy reality, and what keeps the film from indulgence is Lawrence's recognition that he has gone past it. "There must be something wrong with me," he reflects at the end, without self-pity (or pride). "There's no one that's gone this far and failed."

In an age when no band ever seems to split up, all pop careers end in creative failure; Lawrence's isn't that. But there's a brief glimpse of him presenting a radio show that hints at a reasonable compromise with the rest of the world. No one would blame him if he made it.

Henry K. Miller

CREDITS

Produced by
Paul Kelly
Director of Photography
Paul Kelly
Edited by
Paul Kelly
Music
Go-Kart Mozart
Re-Recording Mixer
Dennis Wheatley

©Paul Kelly/Heavenly Films Limited

Production Companies
Heavenly Films presents
A Paul Kelly film
Executive Producer
Martin Kelly

In Colour
[1.85:1]

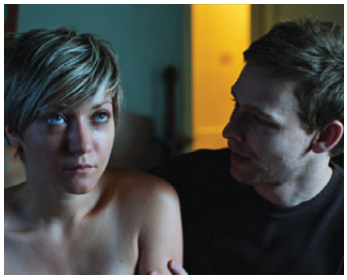
Distributor
Heavenly Films

7,705 ft + 8 frames

SYNOPSIS A fly-on-the-wall documentary about Lawrence, lead singer of Go Kart Mozart, former lead singer of Felt and Denim, luminary of the indie scene and would-be pop star. Lawrence is filmed during the protracted production of Go Kart Mozart's third album *On the Hot Dog Streets*, between the mid-2000s and the present. As well as spending time in the studio, he performs gigs, gives interviews and makes arrangements with his record company. The film hints at the precariousness of his position, touching on his mental-health and drug problems, court appearances and spells in temporary accommodation. Speaking to the filmmakers, Lawrence reflects on his lack of fame and money after three decades as a recording artist.

Lovely Molly

USA 2012
Director: Eduardo Sánchez
Certificate 15 100m 12s



Gretchen Lodge, Johnny Lewis

Eduardo Sánchez, co-director of *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), heads back to the Maryland woods in pursuit of new ghosts for his latest solo project *Lovely Molly*, in which he takes the haunted-house/woman-in-peril subgenre and spikes it up with his trademark (by now ubiquitous in horror film) videocam footage. Molly and Tim, both in their late twenties, have just got married and moved into Molly's deceased parents' isolated home to help make ends meet. But before long the house's creaking noises and the family's troubled past unsettle ex-heroin addict Molly, who takes up the habit again to help her confront tormenting ghosts.

Attempting to portray the process of mental disintegration (mostly in women) is a near constant in horror films – think of *The Orphanage* and the original version of *The Silent House* (although the film that Sánchez admits to having viewed shortly before he started shooting is Polanki's 1965 masterpiece *Repulsion*). All these films adopt houses as the setting and Freudian-symbolic framework for the individual's mental collapse, and *Lovely Molly* is no exception. The difference here is that the film's metaphors – including a series of too-literal visual and sound allusions to horses, referring to the possibility of an abusive father – are presented heavy-handedly.

In order to get into Molly's head, Sánchez alternates from third-person camerawork to first-person shakycam, the dichotomy in perspective designed to illustrate the ambiguity and overlapping origins of Molly's withdrawal from the world, whether paranormal or otherwise. Pushing the concept of mediated reality further, Sánchez has Molly pick up the camera whenever she starts hallucinating (the excuse being that she keeps a video diary of her life), as if she is unable to believe what she sees until it's captured on video. Inevitably, this gimmick soon turns ludicrous, especially during her most deranged moments, although her accompanying humming is a nice touch.

The problem is that there are so many real-life skeletons in Molly's cupboard that ultimately the ghosts become obsolete. Drug addiction, child abuse, mental illness – all narrative threads left undeveloped in favour of cheap, feeble scaremongering mainly propelled by an irritatingly over-insistent sound design. Factor in too the small-town American context and the damage done to Molly's mental health by both father and husband, and the result is an over-egged pudding, a messy and unfocused script, and a genuine missed opportunity.

Mar Diestro-Dópido

CREDITS

Produced by
Robin Cowie
Gregg Hale
Jane Fleming
Mark Ordesky
Written by
Eduardo Sánchez
Story by Jamie Nash
Director of Photography
John W. Rutland
Edited by
Eduardo Sanchez
Production Designer
Andrew White
Music Score
Tortoise

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Production Companies
An Image Entertainment release
A Haxan Films and Amber Entertainment production
An Eduardo Sanchez film
Executive Producers
Robert Eick
Andrew Jenkins

CAST

Gretchen Lodge
Molly
Johnny Lewis
Tim
Alexandra Holden
Hannah
Lauren Lakis
Lauren
Katie Foster
Stacey
Daniel Ross
Victor
Ken Arnold
Samuels

In Colour

Distributor
Metrodome Distribution

9,018 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS Maryland, the present. Newlyweds Molly, a mall janitor, and Tim, a lorry driver, have moved into Molly's family home owing to financial difficulties. The house, isolated in the woods, has been empty since Molly's parents died. One night something triggers the burglar alarm. The police find the back door open but no one in the house. Alone next day, Molly hears a girl crying inside a wardrobe in the room she shared with her sister Hannah. She extends her hand and walks in.

Tim has to travel on Molly's birthday, so she chooses to spend the day with Hannah and colleagues instead. That night when she goes back home, she finds the light on in the sisters' room. She hears noises, and a male voice calling her name. To calm herself down, she injects heroin. When Tim arrives home, the house is in a mess and Molly is distant and withdrawn. Realising that Molly – a recovering drug addict – has again become hooked on heroin, he seeks advice from Hannah and a doctor, but events begin spiralling out of control. Recording everything in her video diary, Molly captures footage of a mystery mother figure and her two daughters while hiding in the bushes.

Tim leaves the house after a row. On his return, he discovers footage on Molly's camera showing him kissing the mysterious woman. Molly has disappeared. The police find the body of the mysterious woman's older daughter in the woods. Molly is taken to a psychiatric hospital.

In a coda, Hannah is in the empty house, where she hears the sound of a girl crying inside the wardrobe. She extends her hand and walks in.

Strings fellow: 'The Man with the Jazz Guitar'

The Man with the Jazz Guitar

United Kingdom 2012
Director: Marc Mason
Certificate U 115m 12s

Ken Sykora – the subject of this documentary by Marc Mason – was an extremely modest and unassuming man. After beginning a career as a professional jazz guitarist almost reluctantly after demobbing from World War II, he quietly and gradually withdrew from playing with the advent of skiffle and then rock'n'roll in the 1960s, becoming instead a well-liked BBC broadcaster. As the decades passed he retreated ever further from the limelight, moving from London to Suffolk and then western Scotland where he retired from national to local broadcasting (now on food rather than music) and, with his wife, began to run a hotel.

Mason's film, as if taking its cue from Sykora, adopts a similar tone. It presents itself as something of a restoration narrative, in which a forgotten figure receives the credit and interest he is due, but it never insists on any epochal importance for its subject. There are glimpses of influence: gestures toward the impression his BBC programme devoted to the guitar must have had on a younger (and far louder) generation of players who came of age in the sixties. At one point the camera pores over an enormous sprawling spidery list that Sykora had scribbled on the back of an envelope in an attempt to recall all the musicians he had worked with in his lifetime. Yet at times *The Man with the Jazz Guitar* is almost comically unprepossessing, bordering on the Pooterish: an early montage of talking heads introduces Sykora and among them is his dentist ('I first met Ken in Ipswich. . .'). There are also frequent off-notes provided by the animations Mason uses to bridge or illustrate scenes: very basic 1950s pastiches with anthropomorphized guitars and a rendering of Sykora himself which makes him look alarmingly like Stewie from *Family Guy*.

But as the anecdotes and details of Sykora's life accumulate, *The Man with the Jazz Guitar* becomes a demonstration of the way in which almost any life, examined with care, can yield a story worth telling and unearth the strange and surprising. To go with his labyrinthine record collection, Sykora harvested a vast collection of files, notes and recipes, indicating the depth of his inner life and interconnected interests. Some of it was used in his radio work for a feature he called 'Ken's College of Peculiar Knowledge' – a detail which contains a whole world's worth of mild BBC-fostered eccentricity. There were also occasional crackpot schemes: that dentist, it turns out, was once asked by Sykora to X-ray his most prized guitar (for a never-pursued plan to move into instrument-making). The presence of Sykora's three adult children as the main interview subjects also gives the film an added emotional dimension. For all that they can remember of Sykora and their mother, the partial nature of childhood memory and intuition, and the privacy of their parents' generation, mean that certain lacunae in Sykora's story stubbornly remain. So that at a certain point *The Man with The Jazz Guitar* is no longer simply tracing the story of a great talent whose lack of ego refined his career out of existence; it tells a shadow story of a marriage troubled at times by alcoholism, infidelity, abandoned ambitions.

Sam Davies

CREDITS

Produced by
Linda Chirrey
Marc Mason
Camera
Marc Mason
Editing
Marc Mason
Dubbing Mixers
Pietro Dalmasso
Ben Newth

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Production Company
Five Feet Films Ltd

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Five Feet

10,368 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS A documentary examining the life of Ken Sykora, British jazz guitarist and broadcaster, and later hotelier. Sykora's career and deep love of cooking, arcane trivia and Django Reinhardt are explored using his own extensive personal archives and interviews with his colleagues, friends and family.

Following suit: Tommy Lee Jones, Will Smith

Men in Black 3

USA 2012
Director: Barry Sonnenfeld
Certificate PG 105m 41s

Ten years have passed since the last *Men in Black* movie, but not much has changed since the first. Agents J (Will Smith) and K (Tommy Lee Jones) continue to keep tabs on Earth's alien population, making sure the humans never hear of their existence. K, who actually quit the agency at the end of the first film, continues to be preternaturally grouchy – Jones doing too good a job of acting like someone who doesn't want to be there – and J hasn't given up trying to make their relationship bearable. Some things are new. K originally quit the agency to be with the woman he loved; now, however, his great love turns out to have been Agent O (Emma Thompson), a senior Woman in Black he met in the 1960s but abandoned because the agency forbids its agents to 'fraternise'. Probably confident that few in the audience will be deeply committed to the MiB mythology, the writers haven't bothered to 'retcon' the crinkles, and there's an amiable kind of chutzpah to their sloppiness.

When J travels back in time to 1969 to protect the younger K (Josh Brolin) from an alien assassin, the younger O is played by Alice Eve, whose resemblance to the younger Emma Thompson is some degree less than striking – and for the numbers to add up, Eve's character would have to be about ten years old in any case. Still, they're both British – K met O in a London pub where they played darts "until dawn". Likewise the Agent J of the first *Men in Black* (1997) must have been in his mid-thirties if, as we're shown here, he was a school-age child in 1969, which feels wrong too.

Although the stakes are high – it will prevent an alien invasion in the present – Agent J's mission is quite straightforward: go back and kill the bad guy before he kills the good guy. The plot is padded out with set pieces in which J and young K narrowly fail, one of them staged in Andy Warhol's Factory – in which Warhol, played by the excellent mimic Bill Hader, turns out to be an undercover agent. The writers' one bit of real ingenuity is the time machine itself. J could easily go back a few minutes each time the bad guy gets away – except that for the machine to work, its user needs to be plummeting to earth, a device that also exploits one of 3D's few really effective applications: vertiginous views from above.

The scene in which Agent J jumps back in time by leaping from the top of the Chrysler Building, while alien spacecraft attack Manhattan, is one of the most exhilarating uses of special effects in recent tentpole memory, and certainly more effective than the corresponding sequence in *The Tree of Life*. After J activates the time machine (it's a handheld gizmo), all time is rebooted, and he is for a moment falling towards a prehistoric world populated by dinosaurs. Seconds later New York is being built under him, and he is briefly joined on his way down by suicidal Wall Street Crash bankers, soon replaced by VJ Day bunting. The entire sequence, reprised at the end, can't last much more than a minute, but it easily makes up for the rest of the film's air of superfluity. **Henry K. Miller**

CREDITS

Produced by
Walter F. Parkes
Laurie MacDonald
Written by
Etan Cohen
Based on the Malibu comic by Lowell Cunningham
Director of Photography
Bill Pope
Editor
Don Zimmerman
Production Designer
Bo Welch
Music
Danny Elfman
Production Mixer
Peter Kurland
Costume Designer
Mary Vogt
Visual Effects Supervisors
Ken Ralston
Jay Redd

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Production Companies
Columbia Pictures presents in association with Hemisphere Media Capital an Amblin Entertainment production in association with P+M Image Nation
A Barry Sonnenfeld film
Executive Producers
Steven Spielberg
G. Mac Brown

CAST

Will Smith
Agent J
Tommy Lee Jones
Agent K
Josh Brolin
young Agent K
Jemaine Clement
Boris the animal
Michael Stuhlbarg
Griffin
Alice Eve
young Agent O
Bill Hader
Andy Warhol
David Rasche
Agent X
Emma Thompson
Agent O
Mike Colter
colonel
Lenny Venito
bowling ball head
Nicole Scherzinger
Boris' girlfriend

Dolby Digital/Datasat Digital Sound/SDDS
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing

9,511 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS Boris the Animal, a Boglodite assassin, breaks out of prison on the moon and returns to Earth vowing vengeance on Agent K of the Men in Black agency, who captured him as a young man. In New York, Agents K and J, who have been partners for 15 years without K ever opening up about his life, follow leads relating to Boris's crashed escape vessel. Boris, meanwhile, finds the owner of a time machine and travels back to 1969.

Just as K is about to tell J an important secret, Boris kills his younger self, and he is erased from existence, remembered only by Agents J and O, a former lover. Earth loses the defence shield K put in place; as Boglodite spacecraft begin to attack, J goes back in time to kill Boris before Boris kills K. He teams up with the younger Agent K, a happier person because of O, and tracks down Boris with the help of friendly alien Griffin, who is able to predict the future and has the shield technology that will save Earth. On the day of the Apollo 11 launch, they travel to Cape Canaveral – where K originally caught Boris – kill him, and place Griffin's device on top of the rocket. Shortly afterwards J sees his father, a guard at the site, killed by Boris, and witnesses K comforting his younger self – the secret K withheld.

Returned to the present, K and J are reconciled. K explains that the agency made him stop seeing O.

Moonrise Kingdom

USA 2012
Director: Wes Anderson
Certificate 12A 94m 2s

Moonrise Kingdom is very funny, possibly Wes Anderson's funniest film since *Rushmore* (1998), while – perhaps not coincidentally – returning to elements of that film's set-up in that it pits deadly-serious adolescents against their deeply fallible but well-meaning elders. Young Khaki Scout Sam Shakusky runs away with his pen pal Suzy Bishop. They elude parents, police, social services and fellow Scouts for a brief island idyll, are caught and escape again against a backdrop of raging storms and parental discord. Less winsome than its theme of love's young dream might suggest, the film carries some of the acidity that spiked *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007): a dog dies; a boy is stabbed in the kidney; ears are pierced with fishhooks.

Yet it's what recurs from past films that really counts here. As usual, there are portable turntables playing 1960s pop; carefully selected wardrobe items (the narrator's duffle and trawlerman's hat, Mr Bishop's liquorice-allsort trousers); and above all the unhappy children of emotionally or physically absent parents (see Anderson *passim*). At this stage in Anderson's career you could almost compile a database of his motifs that would go on generating endlessly plausible new Anderson films from parts of the old. Of course, you want a filmmaker to have their own vision, and even their own imaginative world, functioning on its own logic. And although there's still an assumption that repetition or limitation is a weakness, and that greatness is achieved through variety and breadth, in reality many of the best directors are only ever themselves, making their film – the use of the singular is deliberate here – over and over again. To his credit, Anderson clearly knows this. So why is his brilliantly designed and crafted film (again deliberate), which he remakes with surface variations every couple of years, also so frustrating?

Perhaps because he is so chronically aware that his own imaginative world isn't real, and uses it like a model train set: scaled-down, delimited, inhabited by figurines. *Moonrise Kingdom* is Anderson's most explicit acknowledgement of his world as miniature. Set on an island, it opens on what could be a doll's house, whirling the viewer around the Bishop home in a series of ingenious cuts and pans. Then there are the Scouts and their camp: all playing at toy soldiers.

Anderson deals, obsessively, with surface depth. He doesn't do characterisation so much as character design. In keeping with his immaculately curated sets, his characters are like extensions of the wardrobe and props departments, defined by objects. Sam is a boy in a coonskin cap and thick-framed glasses, Suzy a girl in ankle socks carrying children's books and binoculars, just

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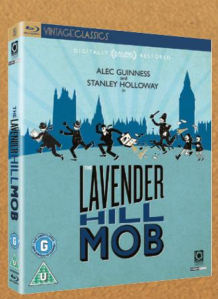

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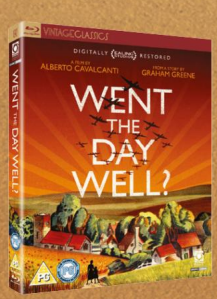

Starry-eyed troopers: Edward Norton

as Ben Stiller's character in *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001) amounted to a bright-red tracksuit or the brothers in *The Darjeeling Limited* were a collection of expensive suits and luggage. Here new collaborators Edward Norton, Bruce Willis and Harvey Keitel slip seamlessly into the Anderson doll's house not least because all they need be is entirely deadpan and deliver their lines in costume. Possibly this represents a profound scepticism on Anderson's part about the knowability of the human character, but it seems just as likely that it represents an indifference. Anderson is, in essence, the dandy his real-life wardrobe of bespoke corduroy suits has always marked him as. The attitude of the great-grand-dandy of them all, Beau Brummel, was said to be that he treated trivial things with the utmost seriousness, and serious things as if they were completely trivial. This is Anderson's worldview too, though it has been obscured by the fact that if he doesn't always seem to be flippant about love or death, that's because he too is always, at all times, deadpan.

Sam Davies

CREDITS

Produced by
Wes Anderson
Scott Rudin
Steven Rales
Jeremy Dawson
Written by
Wes Anderson
Roman Coppola
Director of Photography
Robert Yeoman
Editor
Andrew Weisblum
Production Designer
Adam Stockhausen
Original Music by
Alexandre Desplat
Khaki Scout Marches by
Mark Mothersbaugh

Sound Mixer
Pawel Wdowczak
Costume Designer
Kasia Walicka Maimone

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Production Companies
Focus Features and Indian Paintbrush present an American Empirical Picture production
This production participated in the New York State Governor's Office for Motion Picture and Television Development Post-production Credit Program
Executive Producers
Sam Hoffman
Mark Roybal

CAST

Bruce Willis
Captain Sharp
Edward Norton
Scout Master Ward
Bill Murray
Mr Bishop
Frances McDormand
Mrs Bishop
Tild Swinton
Social Services
Jared Gilman
Sam Shakusky
Kara Hayward
Suzy Bishop
Jason Schwartzman
cousin Ben
Bob Balaban
the narrator
Harvey Keitel
Commander Pierce

Dolby Digital/DTS
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures International UK & Eire

8,463 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS An island off New England, 1965. Twelve-year-old Suzy Bishop runs away from home. The next morning, at a Scout camp on the island, Scoutmaster Ward wakes up and discovers that one of his troop, Sam Shakusky, has disappeared. A flashback reveals that Sam and Suzy met the previous summer and have been planning to run away ever since. Suzy's parents alert local sheriff Captain Sharp (with whom Mrs Bishop is having an affair). Ward sends his Scouts out to track Sam down. Ward and Sharp are both shocked to discover that Sam is a foster child and that his foster parents have decided to give him up after this latest misadventure.

Sam and Suzy evade capture for a while, at one point fighting off the Scouts, but they are finally caught and separated. Sam stays with Captain Sharp until social services can collect him. The rest of Sam's troop, feeling remorseful about their treatment of him, sneak him away and reunite him with Suzy. As a huge storm gathers, they all row to a larger Scout camp on a nearby island, where an older Scout unofficially 'marries' Sam and Suzy.

The storm breaks, causing floods. Sam and Suzy attempt to hide in the church where the islanders are taking refuge, but they are spotted just as a social-services officer arrives. Sam and Suzy flee to the church tower. Sharp proposes that he foster Sam to save him from a juvenile institution, and the social-services officer agrees; Sharp saves Sam and Suzy from plunging from the tower's height.

On the Sly

Belgium/France 2011
Director: Olivier Ringer

Written, directed, edited by and starring Olivier Ringer, this quietly forceful child-centred drama is a family affair in all senses. It's produced by Ringer's brother Yves, and features Macha Ringer as his onscreen wife; but the film really belongs to young Wynona Ringer, Olivier's daughter, who plays Cathy. Told in voiceover – there's no dialogue at all – and entirely locked into Cathy's point of view, the film invites us to inhabit the sad interior world of a little girl baffled by her distracted parents' complete lack of interest in her.

The family's regular weekends in the country are particularly boring and lonely, and on one occasion Cathy decides to test her theory that her parents can't see her at all: when it's time to go home, she only pretends to get in the car, and lets them drive to Paris without her. Naturally, they soon return to search for her, but by now Cathy can't face going back. Smart, resourceful and very good at being quiet, she eludes all the search parties and hides out in the forest in a makeshift shelter she has rigged up for herself.

On the run from the stressed-out adult world, Cathy is ready to contemplate death, but instead finds a reservoir of patient companionship in the natural world. The gift of some seeds from a local farmer has rooted her to the earth – when they sprout despite being mashed up by her father's roaringly indifferent lawnmower, she comes to believe they are magic. She catches a fish and carries it round with her in a bucket, chatting to it and feeding it (and herself) worms. Spiders, snails, a passing deer and a stray dog all give her more feedback than the parents she sees only as the backs of two eternally preoccupied heads.

It's through an understanding of what the natural world is offering Cathy that her dad finally finds a way to bring her back to the human world. A Hollywood treatment would have climaxed on a histrionic purging of emotion at this point, but Ringer allows the drama to play out at the most subtle level, as a process of internal adjustment. The reconciliation is achieved with the same quietness as everything else in this dreamlike film, which maintains a hushed languor that occasionally almost dares you to be bored. At the same time, the stilted and curiously unidiomatic English translation (since there's no dialogue, this is dubbed rather than subtitled) is a real pity, and doesn't match at all Wynona Ringer's unforced and natural performance. For these reasons, the film seems unlikely to appeal to any but the most patient and cinematically literate children, despite its child-friendly point of view.

For adults, though, it's a wonderfully reinvigorating brush with an alternative reality far away from the consumer treadmill, or indeed the demands of narrative progression. The lush forest setting is so beautifully realised, and the central performance so winningly fresh, that the film becomes a magic seed too, planting itself in your mind to sprout in unexpected and pleasing ways.

Lisa Mullen

CREDITS

Produced by
Yves Ringer
Antoine Simkine
Original Screenplay
Olivier Ringer
Yves Ringer
Dialogue
Olivier Ringer
Director of Photography
Olivier Ringer
Film Editor
Olivier Ringer
Original Music
Bruno Alexiu
Sound
Vincent Mauduit

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Production Companies
Ring Prod & Les Films d'Antoine
A co-production Ring Prod & Les Films d'Antoine

CAST

Wynona Ringer
Cathy
Olivier Ringer
father
Macha Ringer
mother
Ursula Noyer
neighbour
Jean Claude Lenaert
fisherman
Pierre Leroux
farm worker
Phillipe Roulin
policeman 1
Yves Ringer
policeman 2

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Showcomotion Films

French/French Belgian theatrical title
À pas de loup

SYNOPSIS France, present day. On Friday night, Cathy – a sad girl of about six – is taken as usual to her parents' country house for the weekend. She has decided that her distracted parents can't see her; they barely acknowledge her all weekend. The only glimmer of interest comes when a farmer gives her some seeds and tells her they are magic. She plants them and wants to see them grow. So on Sunday night, she only pretends to get in the car; her parents drive home to Paris without her.

They come back to search for her, but Cathy is determined to stay hidden. Since the house has no power, food or water, she shelters first in an empty dog kennel, and finally retreats into the woods. Resourceful and imaginative, she builds herself a shelter and forages for food. Her companions are a fish she has caught, which she keeps in a bucket, and a stray dog. Finally her father locates her and works out how to give her a way back without hurting her pride: he leaves a trail in red thread for her to follow, leading back to the place where her seeds were planted. Realising that her father has been tending her seeds, she decides to forgive him. When the car stops, without fanfare, next to her on the road, she quietly climbs inside and the family goes home.

Outside Bet

United Kingdom 2011
Director: Sacha Bennett
Certificate 12A 101m 6s

Based on an autobiographical novel by Mark Baxter and Paolo Hewitt, *Outside Bet* belies its title – Sacha Bennett's film is an almost pathologically safe proposition, as transparently formulaic an underdog comedy as you might ever hope to find. From an opening pub-bound vignette introducing the story's motley bunch of 1980s Fleet Street printworkers-turned-racehorse owners in a manner that suggests a cosy, non-threatening *Reservoir Dogs*, dodgy nicknames and all, to the jaunty Paul Weller number that plays over the opening credits – emblazoned on retro beer mats and mocked-up redtops – early impressions signal a breezy, cockle-warming tale of risk and reward. But however much the film strains to affect a cheeky, laidback air – and it strains hard – it can't hide the tired, calculated mechanics clanking away underneath.

Calum McNab plays Bax, an opportunistic junior typesetter who convinces his colleagues and drinking buddies – including union rep and self-styled Camberwell refusenik Smudge (Bob Hoskins), barmaid and object of unrequited affection Katie (Emily Atack), womanising spiv Johnny (Terry Stone) and tweed-clad mod Sam (Adam Deacon) – to pool their funds and buy a racehorse, unpromisingly monickered 'The Mumper'. It's a gambit that delights Bax's ailing dad (Phil Davis), a failed crooner and lifelong racing fanatic.

Bore horse: Bob Hoskins

Unfolding simultaneously is the Wapping dispute of 1985, wherein print unions declared war on Rupert Murdoch; when Bax's employer Global News (a fictive surrogate for News International) announces redundancies and Smudge insists on strike action, the shared need for a windfall is ever more pressing. Ergo, the gang stake their severance cash on racing The Mumper at Sandown Park.

Bennett appears at points to be angling towards a modern-day Ealing comedy but the tone is all over the place and, cripplingly, Bax remains a bland, largely resistible hero. Hoskins, Davis and Dudley Sutton – as a dopey old timer saddled with the film's worst running gag – merely go through the motions. The usual period musical cues – The Human League, Ultravox et al – are duly trotted out, but while the action takes place in the 1980s, the feel is more akin to a particularly dismal 1970s sitcom, not least in the film's approach to women. And quite aside from its sheer predictability and overuse of hackneyed inspirational homilies, Nigel Smith's script seems to think it's much funnier than it actually is – which, alas, is very seldom.

Matthew Taylor

CREDITS

Produced by
Carolyn Bennett
Tony Humphreys
Terry Stone
Screenplay
Nigel Smith
Inspired by the novel by Mark Baxter, Paolo Hewitt
Additional material by Sacha Bennett
Director of Photography
Nic Lawson
Editor
Kate Evans
Production Designer
Matthew Button
Music
Greg Hatwell
Production Sound Mixer
Malcolm Davies
Costume Designer
Hayley Nebauer

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Production Companies
Bob and Co. presents a Talent Films and Gateway Films production in association with Northcroft Films
Executive Producers
Bob Benton
Nick Simunek
Lord Kirkham
Tony Jimenez
Kevin Cash
Mike Diamond
Ajay Parkash
Chris Howard
Ata Shobeiry
Marianne Kingham
Terry Byrne
Graeme Muir
Alistair Cook
Martin Hughes
Janet Lorimer Bate
Chadha Capital

CAST

Bob Hoskins
Percy 'Smudge' Smith
Phil Davis
Threads
Jenny Agutter
Shirley
Calum MacNab
Bax
Adam Deacon
Sam the soleman
Terry Stone
Johnny
Dudley Sutton
Alfie
Perry Benson
Sefton
Jason Maza
Mickey
Monserrat Lombard
Becka
Vincent Regan
Jago
Kate Magowan
Natalie
Rita Tushingham
Martha
Emily Atack
Katie
Lucy Drive
Erica

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
The Works UK Distribution Ltd

9,099 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS London, 1985. Newspaper typesetter Mark 'Bax' Baxter persuades a group of friends and co-workers – including barmaid Katie, union representative Smudge, womaniser Johnny, shoe salesman Sam and bruiser Mickey – to club together to buy a racehorse, The Mumper. The horse shows promise, but Bax's investors begin to have second thoughts – Sam's business is failing, Mickey is struggling to meet his girlfriend's financial demands, and Johnny is mired in debt. However, Bax is spurred on when his father, a lifelong racing fan, succumbs to cancer. Sam's wife Erica cheats on him with Johnny. Faced with redundancies at work, Bax and his colleagues go on strike – though Bax continues an affair with an executive involved in the sackings. A peaceful protest at the paper's head office is disrupted by thugs; Bax and Smudge spend a night in the cells. Smudge stands down from the union after the paper smears him as an agitator. Bax hires a horse trainer, Jago, who woos Katie. Johnny ends the affair with Erica. The investors, using their redundancy payouts as stakes, take The Mumper to race at Sandown. The horse finishes second, but is later proclaimed winner when the first-placed horse is disqualified. Sam and Erica salvage their marriage. Bax declares his love for Katie, and they marry.

Piggy

United Kingdom 2011
Director: Kieron Hawkes
Certificate 18 105m 59s

In the first scene of *Piggy*, the title character – whose signature touch is a silly false pig-nose, worn ostensibly to give witnesses something to remember beyond his face – is seen in the traditional abandoned warehouse, vigorously kicking a victim to death while onlooking narrator Joe philosophises via internal monologue. At the climax of this prologue, the images of Joe and Piggy are superimposed. Later on, significant hints are dropped: Joe muses that he seems to share one mind with Piggy, supposedly a friend of his murdered brother John; Joe's potential love interest seems completely unaware of Piggy's presence in his flat (which Piggy can get into, despite the paranoid Joe's many locks); and none of Piggy's gruesomely splattered victims interacts with the duo as if there were three people present. Even without a full-on revelation, which *Piggy* ducks out of, we must get the point.

More than a decade on from *Fight Club*, there have been so many 'imaginary friend' movies (random selection: *Secret Window*, *A Beautiful Mind*, *Switchblade Romance*, *Mr Brooks*) that they have become a subcategory of psycho-horror. The seed of the form is the feint that Norman and Mrs Bates are different people in *Psycho* (1960), but the true template is 'Lucy Comes to Stay', an episode of the 1972 portmanteau horror movie *Asylum* scripted by *Psycho* author Robert Bloch, in which meek Charlotte Rampling and murderous Britt Ekland turn out to be the same person. The rules of these stories, where an apparent inner dialogue is externalised as a doppelganger or alter ego, are so well established that Brian De Palma could pull a marvellous joke in *Raising Cain* (1992) in which it turned out that one of the imaginary John Lithgows was real after all.

Towards the end of *Piggy*, things threaten to get surprising, as Joe finds evidence that Piggy has faked his previous acquaintance with Joe's dead brother just to have a reason to indulge in (very graphic) ultra-violence – which also seems to confirm that someone even he probably thought was a projection of his own Mr Hyde urges is a real person. However, writer-director Kieron Hawkes doesn't follow through, and switches to a riff on the last twist of *The Bride Wore Black* (1968) to allow the protagonist a chance to complete his vengeance spree.

While not as impressive as Brendan Muldowney's underrated, similarly themed *Savage* (2009), *Piggy* does have a good sense of urban paranoia, subtly expressed in the moment when Joe avoids walking down a passage because of lurking hoodies, only to see them from another angle as harmless schoolkids in anoraks. As Joe and Piggy, Martin Compston (*The Disappearance of Alice Creed*) and Paul Anderson (Colonel Moran in *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows*) are a good double act, selling familiar material with odd little details, and Hawkes establishes a threatening, depopulated, not-quite-logical version of London which might as well be entirely inside his narrator's skull. Among the best of a recent run of London subjective-reality horrors (*The Glass Man*, *Heartless*), this could still do with an extra turn of the screw to stand out.

Kim Newman

CREDITS

Producers
Danny Potts
Leo Pearlman
Writer
Kieron Hawkes
Director of Photography
James Friend
Editor
Benjamin Turner
Production Designer
Paul Burns
Music
Bill Ryder-Jones
Sound Recordist
Tarn Willers
Costume Designer
Jessica Fell

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Production Companies
Fulwell 73 and DP Films present in association with Creativity Media
Executive Producers
Gabe Turner
Joe Moore
Patrick Fischer

CAST

Martin Compston
Joe
Paul Anderson
Piggy
Louise Dylan
Claire
Roland Manookian
Craig
Neil Maskell
John
Ed Skrein
Jamie
Lorenzo Camporese
Justin
Joshua Herdman
Anthony
Tommy McDonnell
Danny
Jumayn Hunter
Frank
Sonny Muslim
mugger
Ryan Winsley
Chris

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Metrodome Distribution Ltd

9,538 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS London, the present. Twentysomething Joe, a timid messenger, comes slightly out of his shell when his older, more outgoing brother John visits. Joe spends time in a local pub with John and John's ex-girlfriend Claire. One evening, an incident with Jamie, leader of a gang of roughs, escalates into a near-fight, and Joe goes home early. Jamie and his gang attack John, and he dies.

Piggy, who claims to be a childhood friend of John's, shows up and takes Joe under his wing, teaching him to be more assertive and vengeful. With Joe's help, Piggy kidnaps Craig, one of Jamie's gang, and forces him to name the others responsible for John's death. Piggy and Joe find the gang members and Piggy murders three of them – Anthony, Frankie and Danny – while trying to get Joe to take a more active part. Jamie, the most guilty, has received a long sentence and is safe in prison. Claire breaks up with her abusive boyfriend Justin and expresses an interest in Joe, which Piggy discourages. Joe discovers evidence that Piggy never knew John and might even be a projection of his own personality. After a fight, Piggy leaves.

Joe tells Claire that he's responsible for the killings and assaults Justin – knowing that he will be sent to prison, where he can complete his revenge.

Piranha 3DD

USA 2012
Director: John Gulager
Certificate 18 82m 31s

Made under the aegis of Roger Corman, Joe Dante's *Piranha* (1978) was intended as a *Jaws* cash-in but had the benefit of a sharp John Sayles script (the cynical solution to the monster attack is to pollute the lake on the grounds that the old chemical factory killed everything else) and a sense of exploitation glee that still allows for moments of horror and poignancy. It spawned a stuttering franchise, with a sequel co-directed by a debuting James Cameron (*Piranha II: Flying Killers*) and a 1995 TV remake using most of the original effects footage, before Alexandre Aja came along and used the title (but not the plot) for one of the most purely enjoyable 3D exploitation shockers of the recent boom.

The task of following up Aja's 2010 film has fallen to John Gulager, director of the three *Feast* films and a proven specialist in crassly over-the-top gore effects, cynical plot/character developments and old-fashioned schlock thrills. Here, Gulager even goes back to Joe Dante in his fond casting of familiar faces in friendly cameos. Although Will Ferrell regular David Koechner, as the sleazemeister who has fired all the lifeguards and hired strippers for his water park, can't quite match the demented glee of Jerry O'Connell's porn producer in Aja's film, it's nice to see holdovers Christopher Lloyd and Ving Rhames given more worthwhile things to do between the gore stunts. And Gary

Slaywatch: David Hasselhoff

Busey makes a fine first victim, succumbing to the fish his old *Big Wednesday* surf partner William Katt vanquished in the 1995 *Piranha*.

The film's biggest coup is landing David Hasselhoff to play an exaggerated version of himself, in a self-mocking turn in the manner of Jerry Lewis in *The Bellboy* (1960) and Bruce Campbell in *My Name Is Bruce* (2007). The funniest moment in the film comes when a kid who doesn't know who Hasselhoff is ("Maybe you saw me in *Anaconda III*? *Jekyll & Hyde* on Broadway?") tries to get him to be an actual lifeguard, setting up a punchline that reaffirms Gulager's genial ruthlessness as it is extended through a long, Hasselhoff-centric closing credits sequence which features outtakes and also actual plot.

For the rest of it, *Piranha 3DD* doesn't live up to its name, not least because the biggest indignities are heaped on repulsive men – the stud who has to cut his penis off when he's bitten by a piranha concealed in his girlfriend's vagina (severed penis jokes are a *Piranha* convention) and the gross guy who has to pull a toothy fish out of his rectum – rather than the pneumatic extras who run screaming past the camera. Nothing special, and less distinctive than the *Feast* films, this is still lightly likeable.

Kim Newman

CREDITS

Produced by
Mark Canton
Marc Toberoff
Joel Soisson
Written by
Patrick Melton
Narcus Dunstan
Joel Soisson
Based on Characters Created by
Peter Goldfinger
Josh Stolberg
Director of Photography
Alexandre Lehmann
Edited by
Devin C. Lussier
Martin Bernfeld
Kirk Morri
Production Designer
Ermanno di Febo-Orsini
Music
Ella Cmiral
Sound
Michael Rayle
Costume Designer
Carol Cutshall

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Production Companies
Dimension Films presents a Mark Canton/IPW production
In association with Neo Art & Logic
A film by John Gulager
Executive Producers
Bob Weinstein
Harvey Weinstein
Ben Ormand
Matthew Stein
Chako Van Leeuwen

CAST

Danielle Panabaker
Maddy
Matt Bush
Barry
David Koechner
Chet
Chris Zylka
Kyle
Katrina Bowden
Shelby
Gary Busey
Clayton
Christopher Lloyd
Mr Goodman
Ving Rhames
Deputy Fallon
David Hasselhoff
himself

Dolby Digital/Datasat
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd

7,426 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS Lake Cross, Arizona, the present. A year after an attack by prehistoric piranha devastated a nearby resort, entrepreneur Chet plans the opening of 'The Big Wet', an adult-themed water park, though his stepdaughter Maddy, a marine biologist, disapproves. Returning from college, Maddy is torn between her old boyfriend Kyle, a crooked cop who looks the other way as Chet cuts legal corners in his business, and Barry, the water-park minion who has always loved her. Because Chet has tapped into an underground lake in order to save money, a new batch of piranha are let loose. Several of Maddy's friends are eaten after they take nighttime dips in the lake. Maddy consults Goodman, a piranha specialist who has theories about this fast-evolving strain, but is unable to convince Chet not to go ahead with the opening of his water park. David Hasselhoff makes a personal appearance as celebrity lifeguard at the ceremony, and Deputy Fallon, who lost his legs in the original fish attack, tries to overcome his fear of the water by visiting the park. The fish get into the park and carnage ensues as many of the patrons are eaten. Maddy orders the pools to be drained and Barry saves her life as she struggles to control the situation; Chet and Kyle attempt to escape and are killed in freak accidents.

With the park drained and most of the fish dead, the crisis seems over, but Goodman gets in touch to say that the piranha are on the point of developing legs and coming out of the water.

Planet of Snail

USA/South Korea/ Japan/Finland 2011
Director: Yi Seung-Jun

Cinema is no stranger to blindness. Werner Herzog's *Land of Silence and Darkness* (1971), Derek Jarman's *Blue* (1993), Gary Tarn's *Black Sun* (2005): these are just a few of the films that have, in their own distinctive ways, explored the social, aesthetic and philosophical dimensions of sightlessness. That each of them is uncommonly good is perhaps no coincidence: directors are preoccupied with ways of seeing, of constructing reality in small, gradual steps, of thinking spatially.

Yi Seung-Jun's documentary *Planet of Snail* deserves to be added to the pantheon of cinema about blindness. It's a tenderly observed portrait of Young-Chan, deaf and blind since childhood, and his wife Soon-Ho, who has a spinal deformity. She's so small that when they walk the city streets together they resemble a little-and-large double act. She communicates with him by finger-Braille, tapping his fingers like an avant-garde pianist searching a keyboard for secret melodies. She has spent much of her life in physical pain, in isolation: Young-Chan, with his dry wit, his facility for poetic expression, his calmness, is as much a lifeline to her as she is to him.

Yi's last film *Children of God* (2008) was a finely textured account of impoverished Nepalese youngsters using imaginative means to eke out existences near a sacred Hindu temple in Kathmandu. One unforgettable detail was the sight of them diving into a river to retrieve gold from the mouths of the cremated dead. *Planet of Snail* too is punctuated with memorable images: Young-Chan lifting Soon-Ho on his shoulders so that she can try to fix the sputtering light in their bedroom; Young-Chan putting his arms around a tree and lingering there with such intensity of feeling that using 'treehugger' as a insult seems like a nadir of philistinism.

The film's title stems from Young-Chan's belief that, as someone who's deaf and blind, even in his dreams his life is as slow as that of a snail. A student of Hebrew, and shown entering writing contests, he likens his condition to "being surrounded by a thick fog". People like him, he claims, feel as if they have been "left in space alone"; they have "the heart of an astronaut". But these sentiments aren't expressed as despairing cries – Yi eschews both pathos and sputtering rage in favour of a more subdued approach that recalls the work of Kore-Eda Hirokazu.

Allaying any anxieties that watching a blind person on screen carries with it a trace of voyeurism, Yi depicts Young-Chan advising local actors who are developing a play about deaf-blindness. In another scene, the ever-impish Soon-Ho teaches her husband to throw pine cones so precisely that, on her order, he flings one in the direction of the camera, hitting the director in the face. Don't be

Labour of love: Young-Chan, Soon-Ho

too gauzy, she seems to be warning him; here's some grit. She needn't have worried: *Planet of Snail* could rightly be called a beautiful evocation of love; more precisely though, it's also a fastidious account of the labour of togetherness.

Sukhdev Sandhu

CREDITS

Producers
Kim Minchul
Gary Kam
Cinematographer
Yi Seung-Jun
Editors
Simon El Habre
Yi Seung-Jun
Music
Min Seongki
Sound Designer/ Sound Editor
Sami Kisski

Production Companies
Presented by CreativEast/ Dalpaengee
A film by Yi Seung-Jun
Supported by the Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program
Co-produced by NHK
In association with YLE, Finnish Film Foundation
With support from EIDF Documentary Fund, Cinereach Documentary Grants
In association with NRK
Developed in association with Eurodoc, Asian Side of the DOC, Jeonju Project Market, Sheffield Doc/Fest MeetMarket
Executive Producer
Cho Dongsung

In Colour
[1.78:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Dogwoof

SYNOPSIS South Korea, present day. Young-Chan is deaf-blind. His wife Soon-Ho has a spinal deformity and is short in stature. They communicate by finger-Braille. They live in a small apartment where she makes food, encourages him with his essay writing and guides him in performing modest but important tasks such as changing a lightbulb. Outside their home, Young-Chan takes Hebrew lessons, writes a play for his local church and helps actors from a theatre company to develop their production about deaf-blindness. Eventually, he learns to navigate the city streets on his own.

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Polisse

Director: Maïwenn
Certificate 15 127m 33s

Narcissistic, neurotic, violent, vain: the Child Protection Unit officers around whom Maïwenn's *Polisse* revolves are difficult to like, despite the good work they do. The same might be said of the film itself, which is wrought with similar flaws. Though its subject-matter is noble – it's based on real-life cases handled by the Paris CPU – the film gives short shrift to the everyday business of child protection and instead spends far too long wallowing in the private lives of these men and women. The director makes a further misstep by casting herself as a shy and seemingly prim photographer, Melissa, who embarks on a tentative relationship with one of the team, bringing in a romantic subplot that at first is merely distracting, and ultimately implausible.

Whimsy and romance notwithstanding, *Polisse* (the title is a pointedly childish misspelling) paints a depressing, documentary-style picture of contemporary Paris. The principal setting is Belleville, a working-class, multi-ethnic neighbourhood, here filled with intractable Muslim patriarchs and impoverished African mothers who must abandon their children to survive. The political context is sketched in with a heavy hand: the bureau chief has a picture of Nicolas Sarkozy on his wall, and the officers warn Romanian immigrants running a pickpocket ring that "in France, parents don't exploit their kids". Of course, in France parents abuse their children in other ways, and as one character points out, "There's rape in posh areas too." Sure enough, we are given a brief turn from Louis-Do de Lencquesaing as a frightening, sadistic businessman with an inverse Oedipus complex whose links to the powers that be see him let off the hook, much to the frustration of the team and in particular the volatile Fred, magnificently portrayed by the rapper JoeyStarr.

His is the standout performance – crackling with arrogance and self-righteousness yet offering some tender moments of reigned-in anguish – in a film replete with superb actors all on fine form. There's no doubt that Maïwenn has a gift for eliciting naturalistic performances from her actors, and the children in particular are astoundingly convincing. But a series of excellent vignettes is not the same thing as an excellent film, and the rapid-fire flight through briefly snatched scenes leaves one hungry for something more fully fleshed-out. The comparisons some critics have made with *The Wire* may be based less on shared thematic or structural similarities than the fact that *Polisse* has the feel of a compressed television series.

More problematic still is the film's rather schizophrenic tone, which may in part be due to the director's collaboration with actress Emmanuelle Bercot on the script. In the press notes Maïwenn states that Bercot (who also stars as CPU member Sue Ellen) brought realism to the work, while the director herself kept trying to add humour, seeing laughter as the only weapon against human misery. It's a solid enough strategy, and no doubt well intentioned, but as the team laugh uproariously in the face of a tween girl who has used oral sex to regain a stolen mobile phone, it becomes clear that this is not fond, gentle teasing but a hard and callous response that comes at the expense of a child who knows no better. Wittingly or not, Maïwenn uses the serious dramatic elements gleaned from her research for cheap laughs and fast judgements, from which no real understanding can be gained. The subject-matter is too immense to be compromised by her admixture of triviality and self-importance.

Catherine Wheatley

Shooting range: Maïwenn

CREDITS

Produced by
Alain Attal
Written by
Maïwenn
Emmanuelle Bercot
Director of Photography
Pierre Aïm
Editor
Laure Gardette
Yann Dedet
Art Director
Nicolas de Boiscuillé
Music
Stephen Warbeck
Sound
Nicolas Provost
Sandy Notarianni
Rym Debbarh-Mounir
Emmanuel Croset
Costumes
Marité Coutard

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Production Company
Les Productions du Trésor presents a co-production of Les Productions de Trésor, Arte France Cinéma, Mars Films, Chaocorp, Shortcom
With the participation of Canal+, CinéCinéma, Arte
In association with Cofinova 7, Soficinéma 7, Manon, Wild Bunch

CAST

Karin Viard
Nadine
JoeyStarr
Fred
Marina Foïs
Iris
Nicolas Duvauchelle
Mathieu
Karole Rocher
Chrystelle, 'Chrys'
Emmanuelle Bercot
Sue Ellen
Frederic Pierrot
Baloo
Arnaud Henriet
Bamako
Naidra Ayadi
Nora
Jeremie Elkaïm
Gabriel
Maïwenn
Melissa
Riccardo Scarmarcio
Francesco
Sandrine Kiberlain
Mme de la Faublaise
Wladimir Yordanoff
Beauchard

Dolby Digital/DTS
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Artificial Eye Film Company

11,479 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS Paris, the present. Melissa, a photographer, is assigned to shadow the officers of the Child Protection Unit's Belleville unit, overseen by the beleaguered Baloo. The team includes Iris, a highly strung bulimic; Nadine, who is going through a messy divorce; Mathieu and Chrystelle, who have romantic feelings for each other; lesbian Sue Ellen; and virile, volatile Fred. Melissa follows them as they go about their daily business – interrogating suspected child molesters, taking statements from children, and carrying out a raid on a group of Romanian immigrants who force their children into pickpocketing. She also watches them sharing meals and going out together in the evenings. After the group track down a junkie who has kidnapped her baby from care, they celebrate in a nightclub, where Fred and Melissa share an embrace. The pair embark on a relationship, and eventually leave their long-term partners to be together.

During certain difficult cases, tensions threaten to bubble over into violence. Fred becomes particularly enraged when the unit is unable to find shelter for a mother and child, leading to their separation, and again when a well-connected child molester is allowed to go free for political reasons. Melissa is removed from the project.

When Mathieu is shot during a covert operation, he and Chrystelle admit their feelings for one another. An increasingly bitter Iris provokes a heated fight with Nadine.

Some time later, the chief of the bureau announces that Iris is to be promoted away from the branch. She commits suicide by throwing herself from the office window.

Red Lights

Spain, USA 2012
Director: Rodrigo Cortés
Certificate 15 113m 27s

Magic happens not because it's actually magic but because our attention is elsewhere and we don't notice the conjuror's trick. That's the worldview of US university lecturer Tom Buckley (Cillian Murphy), who together with his more senior colleague Dr Margaret Matheson (Sigourney Weaver in familiar domineering mode), spends much time revealing that various instances of purported psychic phenomena are either hoaxes or readily explicable if you know where to look. It's a highly appropriate theme for a film, since it puts the viewer in the very same position as these sceptical investigators – primed, suspicious and ready to figure out the filmmaker's storytelling sleight of hand. Thus Rodrigo Cortés's third feature essentially follows a pattern set by sundry haunted-house flicks and the *X Files* franchise, but the step forward in complexity here is that there's a distinct emotional foundation to the central characters' empiricism.

In one relatively early scene, Dr Matheson reveals that her need to put her faith in the verifiable here and now is what stops her being overwhelmed by guilt that she's never switched off the machines keeping her comatose son alive, a guilt that would engulf her if she allowed herself to believe in the possibility of an afterlife. Earlier, she asks Tom why he's sacrificing his own academic prospects by throwing his lot in with her project – the answer isn't immediately forthcoming, but when it does eventually arrive it's flagged up by a montage of the visual hints that been dropped throughout the film.

The assumption is that the viewer won't be expecting this revelation – in a film full of unmaskings and shifting theories – but the trouble is that Cortés's big twist isn't as unguessable as all that, leaving the montage-plus-voiceover recap looking like clunky overexplanation for those a little slow on the uptake. Read it as such and it's a rare instance of Cortés not trusting to the audience's intelligence, since for the bulk of its running time this slick, controlled narrative is definitely in the top division of recent mainstream thrillers, showing that the gripping minimalism of his previous offering *Buried* (2010) was but a calling-card to get the chance to work on a broader palette. Yes, he does have a certain tendency here towards overwrought dialogue (Robert De Niro comes off worst as sinister blind psychic Simon Silver), yet the Spanish writer-producer-director-editor also shows that he can get his marquee cast to deliver rich performances – Murphy generates genuine emotional impact from his turbulent character journey. What's more, *Red Lights* displays effortlessly dazzling formal technique in the course of its unfolding intrigues, one particular extended sequence of Tom tracking Silver through city

Perception point: Robert De Niro

backstreets offering a masterclass in teasing editing and immaculate colour design.

From the superficial but somewhat academic flash of his first feature *The Contestant* (2007) through to the now evidently transitional *Buried*, it's clear that Cortés is expanding his reach with every new project, managing to retain some of his key Spanish creative collaborators (composer Víctor Reyes's pulsing strings do a fine job for him here) as he branches out to US co-production partners. The tyro days of Christopher Nolan are perhaps an appropriate reference point here, and though comparisons between *Red Lights* and *Inception* show that Cortés has some distance to go before he's competing with the best of the best, given that this is only his third feature he's making keen progress. **Trevor Johnston**

CREDITS

Producer
Adrian Guerra
Rodrigo Cortés
Written by
Rodrigo Cortés
Director of Photography
Xavi Giménez
Editor
Rodrigo Cortés
Production Designer
Antón Laguna
Composer
Víctor Reyes
Sound Designer
James Muñoz
Costume Designer
Patricia Monné

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Production Companies
Parlay Films presents a Nostromo Pictures production in association with Cindy Cowan Entertainment, Antena 3 Films, Televisió de Catalunya, S.A and the support of Instituto de la Cinematografía y Artes Audiovisuales (ICAA), Institut Català de les Indústries Culturals (ICIC)
With the participation of Antena 3 TV, TVC, Canal+
A Rodrigo Cortés film

Executive Producers
Lisa Wilson
Irving Cowan
Cindy Cowan

CAST

Cillian Murphy
Tom Buckley
Sigourney Weaver
Margaret Matheson
Robert De Niro
Simon Silver
Toby Jones
Paul Shackleton
Joely Richardson
Monica Hansen
Elizabeth Olsen
Sally Owen
Craig Roberts
Ben
Adriane Lenox
Nina
Leonardo Sbaraglia
Leonardo Palladino
Garrick Hagon
Howard McColm
Burn Gorman
Benedict Cohen
Mitchell Mullen
Jim Carroll

Dolby Digital/DTS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Momentum Pictures

10,210 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS US, present day. University lecturer Dr Margaret Matheson investigates apparent psychic phenomena with her younger colleague Dr Tom Buckley, invariably uncovering hoaxes or logical explanations. As their funding runs low, Tom begins a relationship with bright student Sally Owen. Margaret admits her scepticism is linked to her decision to keep her comatose son on life-support rather than turn off the machines. She becomes anxious when, after a controversial absence, the famous blind psychic Simon Silver – the only one who has ever given her cause to doubt her scepticism – announces his return to the stage. When Margaret has a heart attack, Tom decides to expose Silver in order to secure new funding. Tom is seemingly stalked by unseen forces, which he fears are connected to Silver's telekinetic powers. Moreover, when rival academic Dr Paul Shackleton makes a publicity-seeking bid to quantify Silver's abilities, Silver appears to pass all the tests. Sally scans Shackleton's video footage and realises that Silver is conning the scientists: he can, in fact, see.

At Silver's final stage appearance, Tom enters the auditorium where Silver is wowing the audience. Lights explode in a frightening display – but it's Tom's paranormal gifts that are causing it, and he thus exposes Silver as a fake. Tom's work as an investigator has been a quest to find someone else who shares his own genuine powers.

Royal courter: Alicia Vikander, Mads Mikkelsen

A Royal Affair

Denmark/Sweden/ Czech Republic/Germany 2012
Director: Nikolaj Arcel
Certificate 15 137m 45s

Zentropa, the Danish production outfit co-founded by Lars von Trier and famous for its Dogme films of the late 1990s, has now made a full-blown costume drama. This can't help but seem like an utter abandonment of Dogme creed, which famously called for low-budget films shot in the 'here and now'. Then again, for director Nikolaj Arcel, *A Royal Affair* isn't such a departure. His debut feature *King's Game* (2004) focused on political conspiracy and manipulation of the media, and for all its heritage-film trappings and 18th-century settings, the new film has similar preoccupations – this is as much a conspiracy thriller as a romantic drama. It is also as rooted in character and behaviour as many of the Dogme films.

Arcel and his screenwriting partner Rasmus Heisterberg are fascinated by the machinations at Christian VII's court. The king (Mikkel Boe Følsgaard) is thought of as a dolt by the courtiers who rule Denmark very repressively in his name. The first time we see him, when the English-born Princess Caroline (Alicia Vikander) is brought to Denmark to marry him, he is giggling inanely behind a tree. He is vain ("Don't steal my light"), prefers his pet dog to his wife, and enjoys carousing in the company of big-breasted women. He is a pathetic, slightly grotesque figure, but the filmmakers resist the temptation to caricature him too much. Very movingly played by Følsgaard (who won a best actor award at the Berlin Film Festival), he has a childlike innocence about him as he struggles vainly to overcome his own erratic temperament.

Johann Struensee (Mads Mikkelsen) is the reforming, Rousseau-loving doctor who befriends the king. With Christian's patronage, he is able to enact liberal reforms and pass health measures to improve the plight of the long-suffering Danish people. But Struensee becomes intoxicated by his own power and casually betrays the king, embarking on an affair with Caroline.

Arcel's approach is even-handed and subtle. Struensee has the hallmarks of a conventional romantic hero – he is good looking, idealistic and sweeps the queen off her feet – but at the same time Mikkelsen conveys his arrogance and self-righteousness. The queen isn't a Garbo-like tragic heroine but a young and nervous woman who turns to Struensee as one of the few sympathetic

SYNOPSIS Denmark 1766. Young English-born princess Caroline Mathilde arrives for an arranged marriage with King Christian VII. The king is mentally unstable and the marriage isn't happy, though Caroline gives birth to a son, Frederick.

The king's condition deteriorates, and German doctor Johann Struensee is hired as his personal physician. Johann and the king become firm friends. Increasingly powerful at court, Johann persuades the king to introduce liberal reforms and weaken the power of the oppressive aristocracy. Johann and the queen begin an affair. When the queen falls pregnant with Johann's child, they try to convince the king that it is his.

Previously popular with the people thanks to his reforms, Johann becomes a figure of ridicule because of suspicions about his relationship with the queen. His enemies plot against him and pressure the king into signing his arrest warrant. Although the king plans to pardon him, Johann is tortured and executed. The queen is forced into exile. On her deathbed, she writes a letter to her children, giving her account of the story.

We learn that Frederick later became king and reintroduced many of Johann's liberal reforms.

figures she encounters in a hostile foreign court. Their affection for one another is self-evident, but so is the sense that they're drawn to each other because they are both outsiders.

Although shot for a relatively modest budget (a reported €5.5 million), *A Royal Affair* has the handsome, exhaustively detailed production and costume design you'd expect in a period piece. Arcel throws in various elaborate crowd scenes – angry protesters mustering outside the palace, a bleak and muddy execution sequence – and effectively contrasts the luxury of life at court with the squalour and suffering of the country as a whole. The pacing is brisk and the characterisation vivid enough for the film not to be lumbered by its 18th-century trappings. There is very little mawkishness here either, in spite of the contrived epistolary structure (the story is told as if in a letter written by the queen to her children on her deathbed).

Like Benoît Jacquot's recent *Farewell, My Queen*, this is a costume drama that takes an intimate and often debunking approach to courtly life. The kings, queens and courtiers who appear so powerful are presiding over a world both corrupt and very fragile. They're trapped in their rituals – and when they try to exercise their own free will they risk destroying themselves and those around them. **Geoffrey Macnab**

CREDITS

Producers
Louise Vesth
Sisse Graum Jørgensen
Meta Foldager
Written by
Nikolaj Arcel
Rasmus Heisterberg
Based on the novel
Prinsesse af blodet by
Bodil Steensen-Leth
Director of Photography
Rasmus Videbæk
Editors
Mikkel E.G. Nielsen
Kasper Leick
Production Designer
Niels Sejer
Music
Gabriel Yared
Cyrille Aufort
Sound Design
Claus Lynge
Hans Christian Kock
Costume Designer
Manon Rasmussen

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Production Companies
Zentropa Entertainments present
Produced by Zentropa Entertainments in co-production with DR, Film i Väst, Sveriges Television, Sirena Film Prague and Den Vestdanske Filmpulje/West Danish Film Fund
With support from Danske Filminstitut 60/40 Scheme, Eurimages, Svenska Filminstitutet, Nordisk Film & TV Fond, Státní fond české republiky pro podporu a rozvoj české kinematografie and Mitteldeutsche Medienförderung
With the support of he MEDIA Programme of the European Union
Executive Producers
Lars von Trier
Peter Aalbæk Jensen
Peter Garde

CAST

Mads Mikkelsen
Johann Friedrich Struensee
Alicia Vikander
Caroline Mathilde
Mikkel Boe Følsgaard
Christian VII
Trine Dyrholm
Juliane Marie
David Dencik
Ove Høegh-Guldberg
Cyron Melville
Enevold Brandt
Thomas Gabrielsson
Schack Carl Rantzau
Bent Mejding
J.H.E. Bernstoff
Harriet Walter
Augusta Princess of Wales
Laura Bro
Louise von Plessen
Søren Malling
Hartmann

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Metrodome Distribution Ltd

12,397 ft +8 frames

Danish theatrical title
En kongelig affære

Grief encounter: Igor Sergeyev

Silent Souls

Russia/USA 2010
Director: Aleksei Fedorchenko
Certificate 15 77m 31s

Aleksei Fedorchenko's *Silent Souls* is a disarming affair, likely to confound Western audiences. On the one hand, with its poetic voiceovers, dreamy flashbacks and loving treatment of landscape, it conforms to ideas fostered by Tarkovsky, Sokurov and others about Russian spirituality and soulfulness. On the other, it is at least partially tongue-in-cheek, a very, very deadpan comedy.

The narrative structure is akin to that of William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* or Graham Swift's Faulkner-inspired *Last Orders*. A woman's corpse is being taken on a long journey. The narrator, Aist (Igor Sergeyev), tells us that he lives in Neya – "one of those towns that no one remembers today" – but he's extremely unreliable, and we're never quite clear whether he's telling his story from beyond the grave or whether it's a piece of fiction that he has dreamed up. We know that he yearns to be a writer, like his poet father, but is struggling to find a subject. "The biggest thing was that I didn't know what to write about."

Fedorchenko, whose previous films include *First on the Moon* (2005, a mockumentary about a Soviet landing on the moon in the 1930s), delights in filling *Silent Souls* with details about the culture of the ancient Merja tribe, describing its rites with an anthropological relish. However, he constantly undercuts what seem to be serious academic details. Our suspicions are aroused when he tells us: "There is promiscuity but for a Merjan it's ancient – like an ethnic rite or a custom." These suspicions are confirmed when we see the mourners very solemnly tying threads into the pubic hair of the dead woman.

Lead actor Sergeyev gives a wonderfully dour performance, and so does Yuriy Tsurilo as the dead woman's husband Miron. As they drive hundreds of miles across provincial Russian roads, each tries to be more deadpan than the other – it's the kind of minimalist acting you expect in Aki Kaurismäki's similarly low-key Finnish fables. At the same time, Fedorchenko throws in unexpected flights of lyricism, especially in the sequences showing Aist as a blond-haired boy on the ice with his father.

The daily lives of the protagonists are bleak in the extreme – they work in dull factory jobs in a provincial dead-end town. However, on their strange journey to dispose of the woman's corpse, the grey world around them often takes on a magical aspect. For reasons that are never made at all clear, they bring a pair of budgie-like birds along for the ride. There's also an air of sexual tension – a *Knife in the Water*-like feel to proceedings as it's revealed that Aist and the dead woman were close (and may even have had an affair).

If the director is making a comedy, it is one predicated on grief and yearning. Fedorchenko keeps matters very low-key indeed. As the narrator informs us, it is Merjan custom for the bereaved to tell strangers the most intimate (and often salacious) details about the lost ones. "You'd say things you'd never tell a stranger when your beloved was still alive, but over the dead you're allowed to because it makes your face brighter." This remark captures perfectly what makes *Silent Souls* such a tantalising film – the sly way it oscillates between the comic and the tragic.
Geoffrey Macnab

CREDITS

Producers
Igor Mishin
Mary Nazari
Screenwriter
Denis Osokin
Based on the novel *Buntings* by Aist Sergeyev
Cinematographer
Mikhail Krichman
Editors
Sergei Ivanov
Anna Virgun
Art Directors
Andrey Ponckratov
Aleksei Potapov
Composer
Andrei Karasyov
Sound Recordist
Viktor Gerrat
Costume Designer
Anna Barthuly
Lidiya Archakova

©Mir Foundation, February 29 Films, April Mig Pictures
Production Company
Igor Mishin presents
Executive Producers
Dmitry Vorobyov

CAST

Igor Sergeyev
Aist
Yuriy Tsurilo
Miron
Yuliya Aug
Tanya
Viktor Sukhorukov
Vesa
Vyacheslav Melekhov
bird seller
Larisa Damaskina
Security Guard Zoya
Ivan Tushin
Aist as a child
Yuliya Tushina
Aist's mother
Leisan Sitdikova
Rima
Olga Dobrina
Yulya

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor
Artificial Eye Film Company

6,976 ft +0 frames

Russian theatrical title
Ovsyanki

SYNOPSIS The remote Russian town of Neya, where traces of the ancient Merjan culture are still in evidence, the present. Miron's wife Tanya has died, and is to be buried according to ancient Merjan ritual. Miron's best friend Aist (the film's narrator) accompanies him on an epic car journey with Tanya's corpse in the back of the vehicle. They also take along some caged birds. They have already dressed the dead body according to Merjan custom (tying threads into her pubic hair as also happens on wedding days). En route, they buy wood. Miron talks about his love for Tanya, though his friend (in voiceover) tells of rumours that she didn't love him. It's hinted that Aist may have had an affair with her. As the journey continues, there are flashbacks to Aist's childhood and to a strange incident in which his father threw his typewriter into an icy river.

Miron and Aist drive through the town where Miron and Tanya spent their honeymoon. By the water, they build a pyre and set fire to her corpse, then collect the ashes. Miron throws them in the water, according to Merja tradition. In his narration, Aist reveals that his father was a Merjan poet.

On their way back to Neya, the two men stop in Molochai, a once thriving city which has disappeared and been absorbed by another town. They meet some girls with whom they have a brief fling, then carry on with their journey. As they drive over a road bridge, the birds escape their cages and peck at the men, who lose control of the car and plunge into the water. Miron looks for his wife while Aist searches for his father's typewriter. We realise that Aist has been narrating from beyond the grave.

Day-O-dream believer: Harry Belafonte

Sing Your Song

USA 2011
Director: Susanne Rostock
Certificate 12A 104m 30s

If you were looking to make a documentary about someone's life, Harry Belafonte's provides some dream material: the first musician to sell more than a million records, a film and theatre star, one of the most handsome men on the planet, the first black American television producer, the star of a series of hugely successful TV revues, a fearless contributor to the 1960s civil-rights movement, a confidant of Martin Luther King – not to mention his later role as an anti-apartheid campaigner and the instigator of the charity single 'Feed the World'. Along the way the FBI (he alleges) infiltrated and wrecked his marriage, while Bill Clinton invited him to represent the United States at Nelson Mandela's presidential inauguration (Belafonte refused, in protest at US conduct over Haiti, which gives you some idea of his political conviction). Then there's the cast of characters (to mention only Belafonte's drama-school contemporaries: Sidney Poitier, Walter Matthau, Marlon Brando, Tony Curtis, Rod Steiger) and of course the soundtrack (Paul Robeson, Nina Simone, Leadbelly, Belafonte himself).

At times Belafonte's life is almost *Zelig*-like: one of his 1960s initiatives saw a cohort of young African students brought to the US to study – among them Barack Obama's father-to-be. So varied in incident and achievement is Belafonte's story that there are aspects here which have to be skated over frustratingly. His film production company HarBel for one: while it only produced two films (the estimable neo-noir *Odds Against Tomorrow* and the post-apocalyptic thriller *The World, the Flesh and the Devil*, both 1959), HarBel was groundbreaking for being produced by a black artist and unflinchingly focused on racial issues.

Given all this, you wonder why someone hadn't already made a documentary about Belafonte. That they hadn't – that Belafonte essentially had to instigate *Sing Your Song* himself – is perhaps its main problem. As the project's initiator, with his daughter Gina as a producer, Belafonte narrates throughout. This puts him in the awkward position of having to sing his own praises: "The reviews were stunning," he tells you. "This song found its way into the hearts of the American people." All of which may be true, but these are judgements better coming from others.

Director Susanne Rostock is a competent compiler of archive images and interviewees, and tells well the story of Belafonte's shift from entertainment into full-time activism. But she never establishes the kind of critical distance needed to make *Sing Your Song* a robust investigation of someone's life and motivation rather than a long piece of final-cut and copy-approved memoir. Belafonte's children hint at a dissatisfaction with their father's ceaseless work rate and devotion to social issues, but this is skipped past as quickly as Belafonte's cryptic comment that one marriage ended because of his ex-wife's undue concern over "image".

The film takes its title from a piece of advice given to Belafonte by Paul Robeson: "Get them to sing your song, and they'll want to know who you are." It's advice that has served Belafonte well, but in the case of this film he's in need of someone to take the song of his life story and sing it for him.

Sam Davies

CREDITS

Produced by
Michael Cohl
Gina Belafonte
Jim Brown
William Eigen
Julius R. Nasso
Edited by
Susanne Rostock
Jason L. Pollard
Music Composed by
Hahn Rowe
Re-recording Mixer
Bill Marino

©S2BN Belafonte Production, LLC
Production Companies
Michael Cohl presents Belafonte Enterprises and S2BN

Entertainment in association with Julius R. Nasso Productions
A film by Susanne Rostock

In Colour [1.78:1]

Distributor
Verve Pictures

9,405 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS A documentary about singer, actor and social activist Harry Belafonte. Narrated by Belafonte himself, the film covers his childhood in Jamaica and New York and his early groundbreaking successes on stage and in the music industry. It also charts his deepening involvement as a campaigner on social issues ranging from the civil-rights movement and apartheid in South Africa to gang violence and youth incarceration.

White mischief: Kristen Stewart

Snow White and the Huntsman

USA/Japan 2012
Director: Rupert Sanders
Certificate 12A 127m 8s

In the opening sequence of *Snow White and the Huntsman*, an omniscient narrator reveals that the titular heroine "was admired throughout the kingdom as much for her defiant spirit as for her beauty". The very fact that there is such a narrator takes viewers back to the story's origins as a fairytale, perhaps best known in its 1812 German version published by the Brothers Grimm, and in cinema via Disney's pioneering animated feature *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937). Yet following fast upon Tarsem Singh's high-camp *Mirror Mirror*, this altogether more gothic feature debut from commercials director Rupert Sanders (and produced by former Walt Disney Studios chairman Joe Roth, who also recently refitted *Alice in Wonderland*) is again playing fast and loose with the canonic sources.

As "the fairest of them all", of course Snow White should have beauty, but her possession of "defiant spirit" marks a departure from the character's customary passivity. Indeed, by the end, the heroine, leading an army into battle on her charger and personally dispatching the wicked Queen Ravenna (a scene-stealing Charlize Theron), seems as close to Joan of Arc as to the tradition. It is part of a retooling designed to bring together both male and female teens, much as Snow White unites the ailing kindgom's disparate communities. The calculated casting of emo icon Kristen Stewart practically guarantees interest from the *Twilight* crowd, as do the film's occasional excursions into moody horror-lite, with Snow experiencing the Dark Forest as a spore-induced bad trip of wraiths and vampires. Further elements from the original story are also retained but changed enough to subvert expectation: the magic mirror takes on a liquid anthropoid form that only Ravenna appears to see; there are not seven but eight dwarfs (played by a rogues' gallery of British actors); Ravenna adopts the magical guise not of an old crone but of the dashing young Prince William (Sam Claflin); and when Snow succumbs to the apple's poison, the prince's kiss fails to revive her. Meanwhile Ravenna, who takes beauty baths and feeds vampirically on local maidens to maintain her own youthful looks, seems to have been modelled on the Countess Báthory of legend – or perhaps on Sharon Stone's ageing villainess from *Catwoman* (2004).

Some influences on the film's fabric introduce a sophisticated kind of wit through allusion's back door. When Snow's escort, the huntsman Eric (Chris Hemsworth), responds to a monster under a bridge by shouting "Troll!" he evokes not just a long history of Nordic folklore but also the recent revisionism of André Ovredal's

SYNOPSIS Young Snow White's mother dies. Shortly afterwards, the wicked Ravenna enchants Snow White's father King Magnus and murders him on their wedding night. Snow White's playmate Prince William and his father Duke Hammond escape the castle, but Snow White is imprisoned. Ravenna is joined by her brother Finn.

Seven years later, the land has been poisoned by Ravenna's reign. Ravenna magically absorbs maidens' beauty to perpetuate her own, though her magic mirror reveals that Snow White has the power either to destroy her or grant her immortality. Snow White overcomes Finn and escapes through a sewer to the Dark Forest. Ravenna recruits Eric the huntsman to capture Snow White, promising to bring his wife back to life – but realising that this is a trick, Eric helps Snow White to get away. They spend the night in an all-female village, which Finn's men burn down; Snow White and Eric then follow eight dwarfs to a hidden forest, where Snow White is blessed as the kingdom's saviour by a forest spirit. Finn's men attack, killing the dwarf Gus, but William joins Snow White's side, and Eric kills Finn. Disguised as William, Ravenna tricks Snow White into eating a poisoned apple which sends the young woman into a death-like state that not even a kiss from William can break – but back at Hammond's stronghold, a kiss from the distraught Eric raises her. Snow White's speech rouses all to attack Ravenna. They charge up to the castle, while the dwarfs sneak through the sewers to open the gates. Ravenna conjures up an army of soldiers from glass shards and sends them to cut through Eric and William's men. As Ravenna is about to pierce Snow White's heart, Snow White stabs her from beneath. Snow White is crowned queen.

Trollhunter (2010). When Snow encounters a divine stag walking on water in an idyllic enchanted forest, the ironic disingenuousness of the comment that "no one's ever seen this before" from dwarf leader Beith (Ian McShane) will be recognised by anyone who has seen precisely this before in *Princess Mononoke* (1997). And while the climactic charge by Snow's knights against a tide-bound castle is meant to be serious, the visual echo of the final scene of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975) is less so.

"You see, we're not that different, are we?" Ravenna tells Snow – and if this clichéd line at first seems out of place, and Snow's response to it ("I'm everything you're not") entirely appropriate, in fact the natural youth and beauty that separate Snow from Ravenna will be just as subject to the ravages of time. As Snow finally commits her first act of stabby murder (Ravenna's preferred method) and casts a furtive glance at her own reflection in Ravenna's mirror before acceding to the throne that Ravenna has just vacated – and as the love triangle between Snow, William and Eric remains oddly unresolved – we are left to wonder whether, despite the fairytale ending, they really will all live happily ever after. It is a brave and understated finish to a film that, along with *Monster* (2003) and *Young Adult* (2011), lets Theron explore the contradictions and anxieties surrounding female body image. Not bad for a Tolkien-esque adventure as good-looking as it is spirited.

Anton Bitel

CREDITS

Producers
Joe Roth
Sam Mercer
Written by
Evan Daugherty
John Lee Hancock
Hossein Amini
Screen Story
Evan Daugherty
Director of Photography
Greig Fraser
Editors
Conrad Buff
Neil Smith
Production Designer
Dominic Watkins
Music
James Newton Howard
Sound Mixer
Chris Munro
Costume Designer
Colleen Atwood
Visual Effects
Rhythm & Hues Studios
Double Negative Visual Effects
Pixomondo
The Mill
Bluebolt
Hydraulx
Lola|VFX
Baseblack
Stunt Coordinator/ Horse Master
Steve Dent
Stunt Coordinator/ Fight Coordinator
Ben Cooke

©Universal Studios
Production Companies
Universal Pictures presents a Roth Films production
Presented in association with Dentsu Inc.
Executive Producers
Palak Patel
Gloria Borders

CAST

Kristen Stewart
Snow White
Chris Hemsworth
the huntsman
Charlize Theron
Ravenna
Sam Claflin
William
Sam Spruell
Finn
Ian McShane
Beith
Bob Hoskins
Muir
Ray Winstone
Gort
Nick Frost
Nion
Eddie Marsan
Duir
Toby Jones
Cole
Johnny Harris
Quert

Dolby Digital/ Datasat/SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures International UK & Eire

11,442 ft +0 frames

The Source

France/Belgium/ Italy/Morocco 2011
Director: Radu Mihaileanu
Certificate 15 124m 36s

The fifth feature from Romanian-born French director Radu Mihaileanu was shot in Morocco but its fictional location is unspecified – it could be any of the countries of the Maghreb. The basic story, of course, is at least as old as Aristophanes: women banding together to bring pressure on their menfolk by refusing them sex. In the *Lysistrata* the aim is to stop the men waging war. The women of *The Source* are less ambitious, simply demanding that water should be piped into their village to save them a laborious and often dangerous trek up the mountain, but Mihaileanu's film explores the underlying issues of equality, religious authority and the stifling weight of tradition.

"Water is for housework, so women must fetch it. It has been so since the dawn of time," pronounces Fatima, resentful mother-in-law to the film's heroine Leïla . Leïla , an incomer from another part of the country – and the only literate woman in the village – believes that traditions can be challenged, and is able to quote the Koran in her cause, confounding even the imam. When she proposes a 'love strike' ("It's the only power we have over men") she gets the support of her husband Sami and her father-in-law, as well as that of the younger women and a feisty elderly widow, Mother Rifle. The rest of the menfolk, led by the village sheikh, are at first scornful ("It's the heat, it's gone to their heads"), then increasingly hostile, while the government official to whom Sami appeals for funding patronisingly responds, "You know what happens next? They all want washing machines."

But in the end, of course, the women triumph; they get their piped water and all sides are reconciled. As in his previous film, 2009's *The Concert*, Mihaileanu drives rather too relentlessly for final uplift, and in doing so simplifies his story and stock-types his characters. A few subplots are hauled in to divert the flow – Mother Rifle's son plots to bring in a batch of biddable women as second wives, Leïla helps her young sister-in-law Loubna to correspond with a young man she's fallen for – but they scarcely vary the overall tone.

Where the film scores is in the energy of the performances, and in capturing the colour and texture of village life, especially among the women: the joyous dancing and ululating at the birth of a child, the richly bawdy conversations in the communal bathhouse. In one of the funniest scenes, the women dance and sing for the benefit of some visiting tourists, but what they're singing about is the laziness of their men and the way official funding always mysteriously vanishes. The men, not wishing to lose face before strangers, are forced to smile and clap along, while the tourists, not knowing Arabic, are delighted by this display of primitive exuberance. Moments like these keep *The Source* watchable, for all its predictability.

Philip Kemp

Pipe dreams: Biyouna

CREDITS

Produced by
Denis Carot
Marie Masmonteil
Radu Mihaileanu
Screenplay
Radu Mihaileanu
Alain-Michel Blanc
In collaboration with
Catherine Ramnberg
Adaptation and Dialogue
Radi Mihaileanu
Director of Photography
Glynn Speeckaert
Editor
Ludo Troch
Art Director
Cristian Niculesco
Original Music
Armand Amar
Sound Recordist
Henri Morelle

Costume Designer
Viorica Petrovici

©Elzevir Films, Oï Oï Oï Productions, Europacorp, France 3 Cinéma, CCE, Bim DistribuzioneIndigo Films, Agora Films
Production Companies
An Elzevir Films and Oï Oï Oï Productions production
Co-produced by Europacorp, Cie Cinématographique Européenne and Panache Productions (Belgium), Bim Distribuzione and Indigo Films (Italy), Agora Films (Morocco), France 3 Cinema, RTBF (Television Belge), Belgacom, SNRT (Morocco)
With the participation of Canal+, Cinécinéma, France Télévisions
With the support of Centre Cinématographique Marocain
With the help of Centre du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel de la Communauté française de Belgique
With the support of Programme MEDIA de l'Union européenne, Coopération belge au Développement

CAST

Leïla Bekhti
Leïla
Hafsia Herzi
Loubna/Esmeralda
Biyouna
Mother Rifle
Saleh Bakri
Sami
Hiam Abbass
Fatima
Sabrina Ouazani
Rachida
Mohamed Majd
Hussein
Karim Leklou
Karim
Amal Atrach
Khadija
Mohamed Tsouli
imam
Saad Tsouli
Mohamed
Omar Azzouzi
sheikh
Malek Akhmiss
Sofiane

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Picturehouse Entertainment

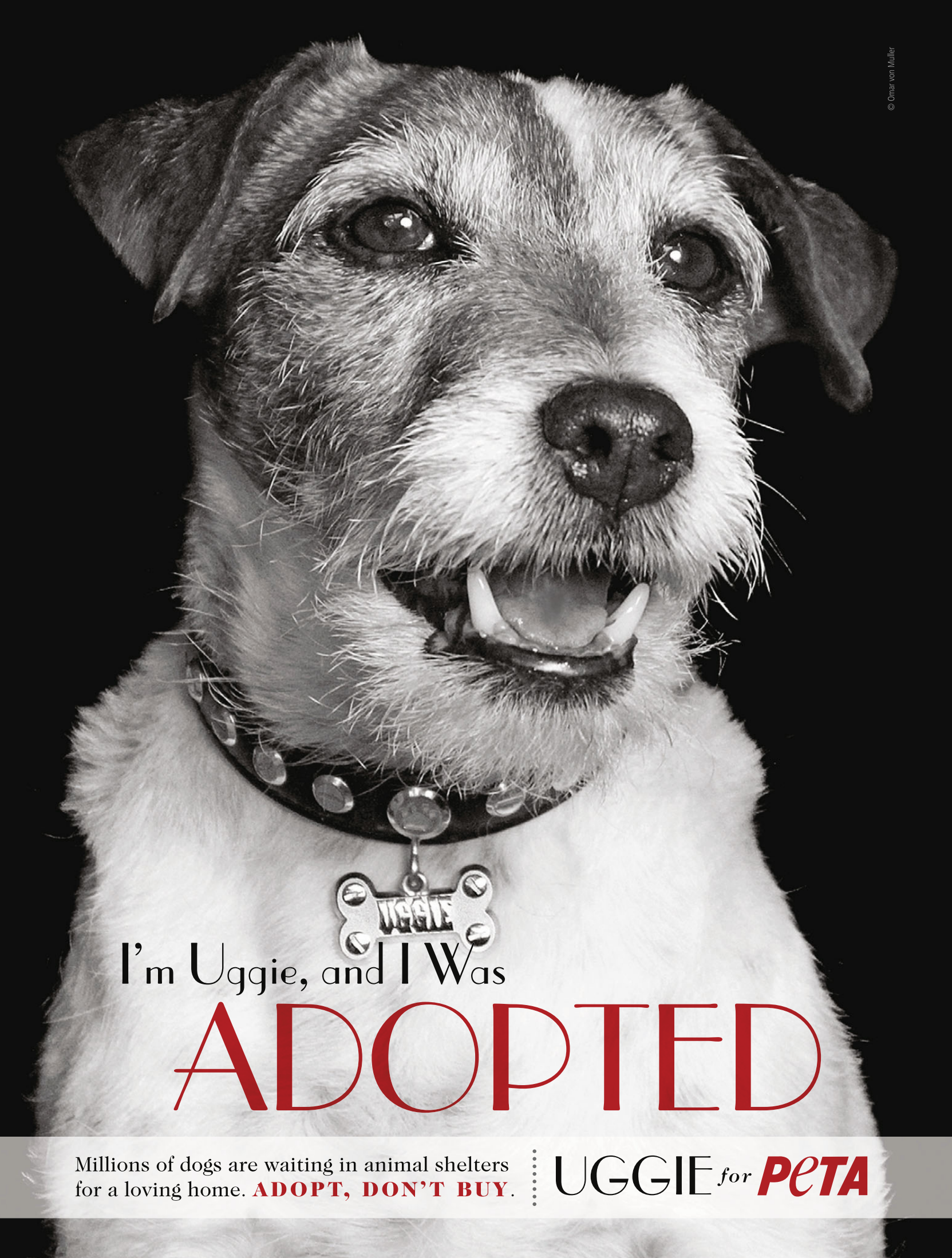
11,214 ft +0 frames

French/Belgian theatrical title
La Source des femmes

SYNOPSIS A mountain village in North Africa, the present. Four women climb a rocky path with buckets to bring water from a spring, the village's only water source. On the way back, one of them miscarries. One of her companions, Leïla , announces at a village gathering that the men should get the water piped into the village, since many other women have miscarried while fetching it. When the men scoff, she urges the other women to join a 'love strike': no sex with their husbands until the water is brought down. Her husband Sami, the village schoolteacher, is supportive, as is her father-in-law Hussein, but her mother-in-law Fatima is implacably hostile (especially since Leïla is an 'outsider' from the south), as is Sami's brother, the ultra-pious Mohamed. Mother Rifle, a feisty widow, encourages the strike.

At night Leïla and Sami hear Mohamed beating his wife Nawal. Fatima urges Sami to reject Leïla and take another wife. A fight breaks out in the mosque when the sheikh tells Sami he should control his wife. Sami visits a government official to ask for funds for the pipeline, but is fobbed off. Mother Rifle's son Nassim arrives, offering to bring in 30 pious women to become dutiful second wives; he secretly plans to supplant the elderly village imam.

A journalist, Sofiane, arrives in the village, ostensibly to study insect life; he was Leïla 's first lover, before being forced to marry another woman. Now that his wife is dead he hopes to win Leïla back. When Sami finds out, he wants to kill Sofiane; however, the journalist explains that, having seen how much Leïla loves Sami, he's abandoned his idea. The imam tries to persuade the women to abandon their love strike, but Leïla out-argues him, quoting the Koran. The women plan a satirical song-and-dance at the harvest festival in Ouria, the nearest town. The sheikh bribes a Berber chief to intercept them, but the women dress the village children in black burqas as a decoy and perform at the festival, to the embarrassment of their menfolk. Leïla persuades Sofiane to write an article about the village for his paper, which shames the government into funding the pipeline.


© Omar von Muller
UGGIE
I'm Uggie, and I Was
ADOPTED
Millions of dogs are waiting in animal shelters for a loving home. ADOPT, DON'T BUY.
UGGIE for PETA

Flirt alert: Kevin Hart

Think like a Man

USA 2012
Director: Tim Story
Certificate 12 A 121m 52s

The distinction of being the first self-help book to crack the box office is no longer attainable, belonging eternally to 2009's *He's Just Not That into You*. (Somewhere, *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* scribe John Gray PhD softly weeps at not having had the idea.) But *Think like a Man*, exec-produced by radio host/gameshow emcee/author Steve Harvey and based on Harvey's own *Act like a Lady, Think like a Man: What Men Really Think About Love, Relationships, Intimacy, and Commitment*, is not to be outdone.

If the film is to be believed, Harvey's bestseller wasn't some run-of-the-mill book but the tome in which "long-hidden truths had finally been released", and second in global-historical importance only to the King James Bible. Harvey himself appears on screen, interrupting the romcom narrative to mouth his own pearls of apposite wisdom – conceptually, it's a bit like Alain Resnais's *Mon oncle d'Amérique*, in which author Henri Laborit explained his principles of evolutionary psychology, which were then played out in the various narrative threads. The only marked difference is that whereas *Mon oncle* is one of the great movies of the 1980s, *Think like a Man* is directed by *Fantastic Four* hack Tim Story, has a terrible pit-band soundtrack and is void of recognisable human behaviour.

Laborit stayed out of the way of his characters, allowing them to make their own mistakes, but Steve Harvey is not the only one quoting Steve Harvey chapter and verse in *Think like a Man* – the ladies are forever having conversations with sentences that start, "Steve says..." this and "Steve says..." that, using Steve's nomenclature ('chirp-chirp girl', 'sport fish') and accordingly eliminating every trace of spontaneity and instinct from their relations with the opposite sex in order to act in full accordance with the Gospel According to Steve Harvey. When the guys get hip to Harvey's Benedict Arnold book, effectively a user's guide that has given away the cheat codes to their terribly simple brains, they start anticipatorily modelling their behaviour around Harveyite precepts, until everyone is effectively robbed of free agency, actors in a script written by Steve Harvey, who assumes the role of sinister puppetmaster. (Incidentally, are there actually adults who think it's wise or expedient to wait for an 'I love you' from a partner before addressing the matter of sexual compatibility?)

When expected complications result from the girls finding their fellas copies of The Book, for a moment it seems like *Think like a Man* might rebel against Harveyan creed and instead illustrate the way in which relationship-advice books for women, as much as pickup-artist tomes for men, banish sincerity, impulse and romance from male-female interaction, replacing these with cynical strategising ("She who controls the cookie controls the game") and scorekeeping. But of course it's soon realised that all was for the best, and everyone lives Harvily ever after.

The charismatic assembled cast make the experience of *Think like a Man* significantly more pleasurable than it should be. As Cedric, who also narrates, Kevin Hart gets most of the good lines, which I'm pretty sure aren't Harveyisms ("A woman will hate you fast," "Who the hell shits with a hat on?"). There are also a couple of choice throwaway moments from Gary Owen, the one married guy, and the only one you never see with his woman – presumably the complexities of marriage are being saved for the sequel, *Straight Talk, No Chaser: How to Find, Keep, and Understand a Man*, based on the further revealed word of Harvey Almighty.

Nick Pinkerton

CREDITS

Produced by
Will Packer
Written by
Keith Merryman
David A. Newman
Based upon the book *Act like a Lady, Think like a Man* by Steve Harvey
Director of Photography
Larry Blanford
Editor
Peter S. Elliot
Production Designer
Chris Cornwell
Music
Christopher Lennertz
Sound Mixer
Shawn Holden
Costume Designer
Salvador Perez

©Screen Gems, Inc.
Production Companies
Screen Gems presents
A Rainforest Films production
A film by Tim Story
Executive Producers
Steve Harvey
Rushion McDonald
Rob Hardy
Glenn S. Gainor

CAST

Michael Ealy
Dominic
Jerry Ferrara
Jeremy
Meagan Good
Mya
Regina Hall
Candace
Kevin Hart
Cedric
Taraji P. Henson
Lauren
Terrence J
Michael
Jenifer Lewis
Loretta
Romany Malco
Zeke
Gary Owen
Bennett
Gabrielle Union
Kristen
La La Anthony
Sonia

Dolby/Datasat/SDDS
In Colour
Prints by
DeLuxe
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing

10,968 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS Los Angeles, the present. Zeke, Michael, Dominic, Jeremy, Cedric and Bennett are friends who play basketball together three times a week. Bennett is married, Cedric divorced. According to Cedric's voiceover, Zeke is a "player", Michael is a mummy's boy, Dominic is a dreamer and Jeremy, who is in a long-term relationship with girlfriend Kristen, is a "non-committer"; the film follows each of these friends as they pursue a new woman or, in Jeremy's case, as he negotiates his stagnant co-habitation with Kristen. However, the women in question are armed with Steve Harvey's relationship-advice book *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man*. Zeke is interested in Mya, but she's following Harvey's 90-days-before-sex rule; Michael matches up with single-mother Candace; underemployed chef Dominic hooks up with businesswoman Lauren; and Kristen tries to make Jeremy put aside childish things. At first scrambling to meet the expectations of the women, who seem uncannily empowered with secret knowledge, the men later find out about Harvey's book, which they use to turn the tables on the women. This strategy works well until the telltale books are discovered, leading to a temporary misunderstanding followed by reconciliation for all parties.

A Thousand Kisses Deep

United Kingdom 2011
Director: Dana Lustig
Certificate 15 84m 4s

A Thousand Kisses Deep (the title is borrowed from a Leonard Cohen song) is the sort of film generally termed a 'psychological thriller', on the basis that most of its action may or may not be happening inside somebody's head. But in fact it's an absence of regard for psychology that critically weakens its case. We are plunged directly into the puzzling, ghost-ridden world of Mia without the merest whiff of information about who she is and why we should care; when things rapidly become head-spinningly preposterous, the film doesn't quite seem to have done the work to earn our suspension of disbelief. Since we know nothing about Mia when her adventures start, we have no idea how or if the past events she revisits have affected her; and since our only clues as to where we are in time come in the form of changing wigs and facial hair, the order of those events is impossible to determine. (As Dougray Scott donned and dropped moustaches, hats and clown make-up, I gave up trying to figure out whether his character Ludwig was actually supposed to occupy normal human time, or was some sort of ageless incubus who just liked to change his look now and again.)

Clearly we're trapped in a sprawling metaphor for Mia's haunted psyche, with Max the lift attendant standing in for a psychotherapist who mans the transport down to the inner self. Lest there should be any doubt, screenwriters Alex Kustanovich and Vadim Moldovan have Max gloomily instruct Mia in the film's opening moments that "Some things never go away, you know, they just keep coming back." But what Mia is repressing – slavering caricature of a drunken rake boyfriend, tightly wound sex-kitten mother and unmanly father – feels like an onslaught of pseudo-deep clichés rather than a real person's experience of life. Ludwig, in Scott's bizarre portrayal, is already a lumpen buffoon before he inexplicably starts dressing up as a clown.

The film's tortured efforts at evoking sexy bohemian loucheness between Ludwig and Mia are summed up by a scene in which he plays the trumpet in the bath, wearing a hat, while she perches adoringly behind him; poor Jodie Whittaker, as Mia, is bent into a shape so uncomfortable that you can feel the pins and needles, and Scott only looks more awkward when he's later called upon to croon in a nightclub, Chet Baker-style.

Throughout the film, dialogue and its delivery are stilted and odd, as if poorly translated from another language, which adds to the sense of nothing really having a firm emotional grounding; artifice reigns, despite sterling efforts by Whittaker and particularly Emilia Fox as her mother Doris to bring

Arms and the man: Dougray Scott, Jodie Whittaker

some sincerity to the piece.

Director Dana Lustig previously produced Rian Johnson's debut *Brick* (2005), a film that freshened tired tropes with a mix of tricky wit and simple empathy. *A Thousand Kisses Deep* has similar ambition, but none of the sleek confidence. Even David Warner's determinedly Hogwartian turn as Max can't lend much sparkle to such a misconceived undertaking.

Hannah McGill

CREDITS

Producer
Ofir Kedar
Written by
Alex Kustanovich
Vadim Moldovan
Director of Photography
George Richmond
Editors
Humphrey Dixon
Alan Levy
Production Designer
Alison Riva
Music
Sandy McLelland
Rose Cullum
Sound Supervisor
Dean Humphreys
Costume Designer
Allison Wyldeck

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Production Companies
Tomori Films/Ofir Kedar present a film by Dana Lustig
Goldcrest
Executive Producer
Yoram Barzilai

CAST

Dougray Scott
Ludwig Giroux
Jodie Whittaker
Mia Selva
Emilia Fox
Doris Selva
David Warner
Max
Allan Corduner
Buddy
Charlotte Lucas
Stella
Jonathan Slinger
Doug Selva
Sheila Ballantine
older Mia
Eloise Barnes
Mia (age 10)
Suzanna Day
morning nurse
Alana Hunt
groupie
Mark Leadbetter
male renter

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
Tomori Films

7,566 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS London, the present. Mia, a solitary young woman, collects her dead mother's belongings from a care home; among the bric-a-brac in the box is a record by a jazz musician, Ludwig Giroux. Mia disposes of the box, but it is inexplicably awaiting her at her apartment building when she returns home. Soon afterwards, Mia witnesses an old woman jumping from the balcony to her death, accompanied by torn photographs and papers. Mia explores the woman's room and finds her own belongings and photographs there. The musician Ludwig turns up, impossibly young, and Mia spies on him as he conducts a fraught extramarital liaison with a woman who appears to be her younger self. Aided by the building's mysterious janitor Max, Mia finds that she is able to use the lift to transport herself to different times in her own life. She warns the younger Mia against a romance with Ludwig, but becomes involved with him herself – and also finds that Ludwig's influence over her life goes back to when she was a little child. Attending her own childhood birthday party, she sees her mother pursuing an affair with Ludwig behind her father's back. Her father produces a gun and shoots at the couple, but misses. Mia goes further back in time to visit her parents as newlyweds, and understands that her mother's affair with Ludwig began before her own conception. Realising the implications of this, she vomits. At the bar where Ludwig works, she confronts him, and swears that she will rid herself of him; he promises her that this will be impossible, but she shoots him.

Mia visits a hospital and holds her own infant self. She regains her mother's belongings from Max, and goes to visit her mother's grave.

Top Cat

Mexico/Argentina 2011
Director: Albert Mar
Certificate U 90m 29s

Made and originally released in Mexico by Anima Studios, this English-language version of a Spanish-language homage to the Hanna-Barbera classic is an extremely pallid affair. A plot – or at least a plot-like substance – is contrived by sweeping up the dregs of storylines and characters (even casually racist ones like the Maharajah of Pookajee) from the 30 original *Top Cat* episodes made for TV in 1961-62, throwing them into a blender and scraping the resulting gloop out on to the screen.

As Top Cat, Jason Harris does a reasonable impersonation of original voice artist Arnold Stang (himself doing an impersonation of Phil Silvers, of course) as well as recreating TC's sidekicks Choo-Choo and Brain, while Chris Edgerly as Benny and Ben Diskin as Spook also do straight Xerox jobs on their precursors. The only difference in voice style is Matthew Piazzi as Fancy-Fancy: gone is the sub-Cary Grant mid-Pacific twang, replaced with Bill and Ted-style dude-speak.

The erasure of the Cary Grant reference is worth mentioning because it's a curious anomaly in a film that otherwise makes no attempt to iron out the hotchpotch of mid-20th-century and early-21st-century elements. The original show's alley cats were late incarnations of a jazz phenomenon, Rat Packers watered down as kiddie fare but still borrowing the swagger, smart talk and ladykilling ways of post-war cool. Their eternal battle with the forces of authority was a reassuringly one-sided affair, since squares like Officer Dibble secretly wanted to be hipsters too. Transplanted into the modern world, the cool cats are faced instead with a maniacally evil bad-guy cop who is ushering in a totalitarian state run by robots and CCTV. Top Cat, the eternal self-preserving chancer, is thrust into the role of saviour of democracy. No wonder he's confused.

This uncomfortable mishmash is reflected visually by the bizarre combination of 2D and 3D animation. While the film preserves the stylised spiky drawings that became the HB trademark, it pastes them on to a crude 3D background, producing some eye-watering visual crunches, especially when a flat character is supposedly standing behind a 3D object. It's a symptom of the project's profound laziness that nobody seems to have noticed the problem and fixed it.

Going my alleyway?: 'Top Cat'

Top Cat was, after all, a cheap, money-spinning TV show and its latterday renown probably has more to do with nostalgia than inherent quality. But it did have a certain style, and there's no style here. The characters are museum pieces; they could, perhaps, be revived by a witty remake in the right hands, but maybe they're best left alone to twinkle softly at us from inside a well-polished, and firmly locked, vitrine.

Lisa Mullen

CREDITS

Producers
Fernando de Fuentes
José C. García de Letona
José Luis Massa
Screenplay
Tim McKeon
Kevin Seccia
Spanish Adaptation
Rubén D. Arvizu
Jesús Guzmán
Based on characters created by Hanna-Barbera Productions
Editor
Andrés Fernández
Art Director
Mario Pons
Character Designer
Francisco Herrera
Original Music
Leoncio Lara 'Bon'
Sound Supervisor
Javier Stavropulos
Animation Directors
Jorge Luis Medina Macías
José Alejandro García Muñoz

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Production Companies
Warner Bros. Pictures presents an Ánima Estudios production in co-production with Illusion Studios
Ánima Estudios
Executive Producers
Fernando De Fuentes
José C. García de Letona
Alex García
Executive Producer
Mariana Suárez Molnar
Illusion Studios
Executive Producers
Hugo E. Lauría
Romina Crespolini

VOICE CAST

English-language version
Jason Harris
Top Cat/Choo-Choo/ Brain/Griswald/Lou Strickland/Big Gus
Chris Edgerly
Benny
Ben Diskin
Spook
Matthew Piazzi
Fancy-Fancy
Bill Lobely
Officer Dibble
Melissa Disney
Trixie

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
Vertigo Films

8,143 ft +8 frames

Argentine/Mexican theatrical title
Don Gato y su pandilla

SYNOPSIS New York, present day. Feline con artist Top Cat and his friends enjoy giving police officer Dibble the runaround – so when Dibble warns them to stay away from a gala concert being attended by the Maharajah of Pookajee, they head straight to the event. Top Cat cons egotistical concertgoer Strickland out of his tickets. Attempting to con the maharajah too, Top Cat finds himself in possession of a valuable mobile-phone gadget designed by the maharajah's electronics company.

It transpires that Strickland is the new police chief, and Dibble has been demoted. All the other officers have been fired and are being replaced by robots and a reign of terror. Top Cat is framed and sent to dog jail, where he thrives, forming a new gang of dog friends. Dibble and the old gang bust Top Cat out of jail. Top Cat defeats Strickland by using the maharajah's gadget to trick him into pressing the self-destruct button on his computerised system. Dibble becomes police chief.

What to Expect When You're Expecting

USA 2012
Director: Kirk Jones
Certificate 12A 109m 41s

Taking Heidi Murkoff and Sharon Mazel's bestselling pregnancy guide as a starting point, this ensemble comedy weaves its words of wisdom into multiple storylines about expectant couples. While there's a token attempt to represent women from different backgrounds, Anna Kendrick's food-van chef is swiftly sidelined for Cameron Diaz's TV star Jules and author and dentist's wife Wendy (Elizabeth Banks). Meanwhile Jennifer Lopez's photographer Holly experiences brief financial concerns but they are soon resolved.

This is an ode to the concerns of middle-class parenthood: stressed fathers meet in the park to bemoan the loss of their social lives; drunken parties end suddenly with an alarm at 9.30pm so that babysitters can be relieved. Some of these scenarios are funny, relatable and well performed – Chris Rock's stressed father offers up amusing asides, while Ben Falcone is a standout as nervous father-to-be Gary, exasperated by his own rich, competitive dad Ramsey (Dennis Quaid). Wendy's pregnancy woes – which include breaking wind at regular intervals – are amusingly contrasted with the experiences of Ramsey's trophy wife Skyler (Brooklyn Decker), who teams her pregnant belly with designer heels and a perma-smile.

But as the expectant parents continue to fret about diets, baby showers and scans, repetition sets in and character and plot take a back seat. Perplexingly, the script seems almost as concerned with weight gain as it is with pregnancy: Jules spends her working life ordering 'fat' people around for a TV show about weight loss, while Wendy treats her overweight assistant Janice (Rebel Wilson) dismissively, instructing, "Don't pay any attention to her." For every joke that succeeds, one falls flat, often suggesting the remains of a running gag hacked at the editing stages.

Baby talk: Chris Rock, Rodrigo Santoro

As is so often the case with anthology relationship comedies – from *Love Actually* (2003) to *New Year's Eve* (2011) – the sheer number of characters allows for little depth. Restlessly flitting from one scenario to another, *What to Expect When You're Expecting* reduces each storyline to a series of bullet points (which parents may query as much as they relate to). It has its disposable pleasures, but with its starry cast and channel-hopping style, it feels more typical of the work of Garry Marshall (*Valentine's Day*) than *Waking Ned*'s Kirk Jones. **Anna Smith**

CREDITS

Produced by
Mike Medavoy
Arnold W. Messer
David Thwaites
Written by
Shauna Cross
Heather Hach
Inspired by the book by
Heidi Murkoff and
Sharon Mazel
Director of Photography
Xavier Grobet
Edited by
Michael Berenbaum
Production Designer
Andrew Laws
Music
Mark Mothersbaugh
Production Sound Mixer
Chris Durfy
Costume Designer
Karen Patch

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Production Companies
Lionsgate presents in association with Alcon Entertainment a Phoenix Pictures production/a Lionsgate production of a Kirk Jones film
Executive Producers
Mark Bakshi
Heidi Murkoff
Erik Murkoff
Alan Nevins
Allison Shearmur
Jim Miller

CAST

Cameron Diaz
Jules
Jennifer Lopez
Holly
Elizabeth Banks
Wendy
Chace Crawford
Marco
Brooklyn Decker
Skyler
Ben Falcone
Gary
Anna Kendrick
Rosie
Matthew Morrison
Evan
Dennis Quaid
Ramsey
Chris Rock
Vic
Rodrigo Santoro
Alex
Joe Manganiello
Davis
Rebel Wilson
Janice

Dolby Digital/ Datasat/SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

9,871 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS Los Angeles, the present. TV fitness guru and *Celebrity Dance Factor* star Jules discovers that she's expecting a child with her dance partner Evan. Meanwhile in Atlanta, author Wendy is expecting her first child with husband Gary. Rosie and Marco are both caterers who own food vans; Rosie becomes pregnant after they go on a date. Holly and Alex, unable to have a child of their own, meet with an adoption worker. Alex joins a group of men who take their children to the park together. Rosie miscarries and falls out with Marco. Gary's father Ramsey announces that his young wife Skyler is expecting; a scan reveals twins. Jules visits Gary in Atlanta for her reality show about weight loss: it's revealed that Gary was a former contestant. While Skyler has a pain-free pregnancy, Wendy suffers and begins to question the baby/parenting methods she advocates in her books. Giving a speech at a book fair, she breaks down and confesses the realities of pregnancy – and becomes a success. Alex and Holly adopt a baby. Jules goes into labour and is taken to the same hospital as Skyler and Wendy. They all give birth successfully, though Wendy has an emergency caesarean. Marco also ends up at the hospital after running over his co-worker's foot with the van. He bumps into Rosie, who is visiting her cousin Skyler. They reunite and start a business together.

Your Sister's Sister

USA 2011
Director: Lynn Shelton
Certificate 15 90m 19s

The portrayal of male friendship, in all its spiky, competitive complexity, has been Lynn Shelton's forte to date. From the friend-breakup of *My Effortless Brilliance* (2008) to the gay-porno bravado of *Humpday* (2009), her films have found their comic insights in the compulsive rivalry of best buddies. In *Your Sister's Sister* she shifts her amused but searching gaze to the fond, fraught bond between siblings, creating a warmly untidy triangular romance in which Jack, a depressed Seattle slacker, is caught unwittingly in the conflicting desires of half-sisters Iris and Hannah.

Jack is played by Mark Duplass (one of the homoerotically challenged heroes of *Humpday*) as an engagingly smart-mouthed buffoon, whose brother Tom's death has set him on a self-destructive course of drinking, unemployment and mouthing-off about Tom's shortcomings at the one-year memorial gathering. Though this latter scene revels in the H.M. Bateman-style horror of mourners struck mute by Jack's crassness, it gives us our first whiff of the compassion the film extends to its characters, and of how loss threads through the story alongside laughter. Recuperating at his friend Iris's holiday cottage, Jack gets drunk on his first night with her sister Hannah, who is reeling from the end of a seven-year lesbian partnership, and they sleep together.

That this 0-60mph mutual consolation looks not only plausible but funny-sad all at once is down to Shelton's ability to coax performances of beguiling naturalism from her actors. Jack and the equally damaged Hannah (Rosemarie DeWitt) spar and flirt needily, couple hungrily and inelegantly and recoil convincingly from one another by daylight. And when Iris (Emily Blunt) arrives, the threesome's histories and secret longings (Iris is in love with Jack, Hannah is baby-hungry, Jack is guiltily drawn to Iris, since she was Tom's lover) seep slowly but effectively through their chatty, teasing exchanges.

It's interesting to see Shelton, a mumblecore mainstay, experimenting outside the usual lo-fi, low-budget, non-pro-player mix by working with high-profile actors like Blunt and DeWitt, who bring a nicely nuanced range of emotions to their portrayal of the sisters. It's their rapport, and Blunt's easy charm as Iris, that give the movie its loose, affectionate feel. Though the dialogue is mostly improvised, it feels rooted in the relationships as well as pleasingly spontaneous (the actors worked from extensive backstories and a 70-page 'scriptment' but have an affinity that belies the film's 12-day shoot). Only during Jack's grandstanding final speech pledging himself to love one sister and support the other do your fingers itch for the red pencil.

Like *Humpday*, *Your Sister's Sister* explores transgression thoughtfully (here it's the quasi-incest of sleeping with a sibling's lover, and Hannah's sperm-stealing sex), but in contrast to its predecessor's one-note tone it delicately weaves in everything from self-pity to the sisterly ties that bind. When the uneasy trio are rocked by revelations, it's the reconciliation between Iris and Hannah that the film pieces carefully together, rather than the nascent romance with Jack. Unusually for a romance (albeit an unconventional one), it doesn't privilege boy-girl love over all others. Unlike *Humpday*, which simply skidded to a halt, it even has an ending of sorts, perhaps too cheekily contrived for some tastes, with a freeze frame pinching the story shut just before the big reveal.

What's really deliciously different, though, is seeing Shelton ditch her claustrophobic cameraphone aesthetic, setting her characters' talky, awkward exchanges in wooded Washington State glades and on shimmering shorelines that amplify their conflicted emotions and the desires they seem determined to dodge. The end result, despite the hipster speak and comic vegan-cookery interludes, feels satisfyingly more like a Rohmer-com than a romcom. **Kate Stables**

CREDITS

Producer
Steven Schardt
Written by
Lynn Shelton
Creative Consultants
Emily Blunt
Rosemarie Dewitt
Mark Duplass
Mike Birbiglia
Cinematographer
Benjamin Kasulke
Editor
Nat Sanders
Production Designer
John Lavin
Original Score
Vinny Smith
Sound
Vinny Smith

©Ada Films, LLC
Production Companies
Ada Films presents a film by Lynn Shelton
Executive Producers
Vallejo Gantner
Dashiell Gantner
Mark Duplass
Jennifer Roth
Lynn Shelton

CAST

Emily Blunt
Iris
Rosemarie DeWitt
Hannah
Mark Duplass
Jack
Mike Birbiglia
Al

In Colour

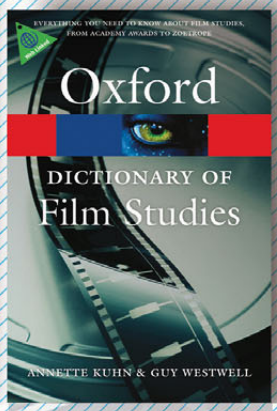
Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

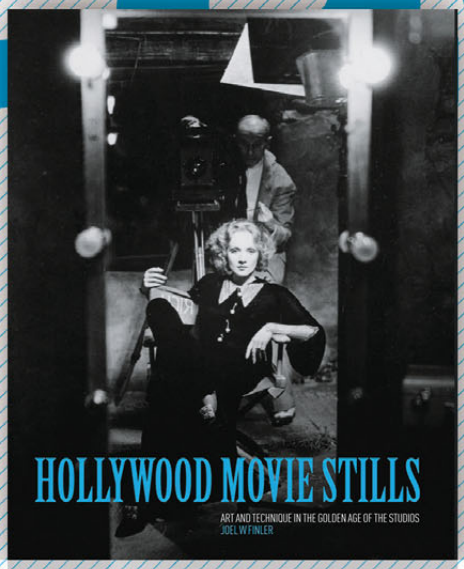
8,128 ft +8 frames

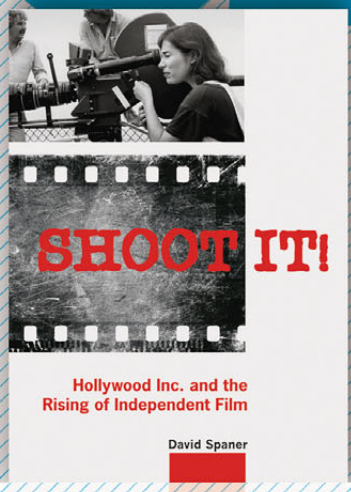
SYNOPSIS Seattle, present day. Iris sends her friend Jack to her family's island holiday house to recover from a depression caused by his brother Tom's death a year ago. Iris was Tom's girlfriend. Jack is surprised to find Iris's half-sister Hannah at the island house; she is upset by the end of a long lesbian partnership. Hannah and Jack get drunk, and sleep together. Jack pledges Hannah to secrecy. Iris arrives and reveals to Hannah that she's secretly in love with Jack. The three hang out together. Iris coaxes Hannah to talk about her longing for a baby. Jack finds that the condom he and Hannah used was pierced with holes. He reproaches Hannah, but Iris is furious with him. Jack leaves to camp out on the island, and the sisters reach a rapprochement over several days. Jack returns to pledge his love for Iris, offering to help out if Hannah is pregnant.

A fortnight later, the three wait happily for the result of Hannah's pregnancy test.

Read







Hunting The Dark Knight: Twenty-First Century Batman

By Will Brooker, I.B. Tauris, 272pp, paperback, £12.99, ISBN 9781848852808

Will Brooker's close analysis of *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight* addresses a myriad of questions: did *Batman Begins* end when *The Dark Knight* began? Does its story include the *Gotham Knight* DVD, or the 'Why So Serious' viral marketing campaign? Is it separate from the parallel narratives of the *Arkham Asylum* videogame, the monthly comic books, the animated series and the graphic novels? Can the brightly campy incarnations of the Batman ever be fully repressed by *The Dark Knight*, or are they an intrinsic part of the character? Do all of these various manifestations feed into a single Batman metanarrative? This will be a vital text for film students and academics, as well as legions of Batman fans.

www.ibtauris.com

Oxford Dictionary of Film Studies

By Annette Kuhn and Guy Westwell, Oxford University Press, 528pp, paperback, £11.99, ISBN 9780199587261

"Rich, thought-provoking and diverse." (Mark Cousins)

If you want to find out more about your favourite film genre or explore current debates in film, you will find everything you need in this one handy volume.

Written by experts and covering all aspects of film – national cinemas, genres and film movements from around the world such as Bollywood, the spaghetti western and world cinema – this is the perfect resource on film and the most up-to-date dictionary of its kind.

www.oup.com

Hollywood Movie Stills

By Joel W. Finler, Titan Books, 224pp, hardback, illustrated, £19.99, ISBN 781781161937

Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo, Clark Gable, Marilyn Monroe... It is through the eye of the stills camera that we experience and recall some of the cinema's most memorable events and faces.

This book is the most detailed and perceptive survey ever devoted to this neglected aspect of filmmaking. It traces the origin of stills photography during the silent era and the early development of the star system, through to the rise of the giant studios in the 1930s and their eventual decline.

Hollywood Movie Stills is illustrated with hundreds of rare and unusual stills from the author's own collection, including not only portraits and scene stills but production shots, behind-the-scenes photos, poster art, calendar art, photo collages and trick shots.

www.titanbooks.com

Shoot It! Hollywood Inc. and the Rising of Independent Film

By David Spaner, Arsenal Pulp Press, 304pp, paperback, illustrated, £16.99/$22.95, ISBN 9781551524085

"An incredible book. It's so needed and so beautifully researched and so extraordinarily readable and so important." (Stewart Stern, screenwriter of *Rebel Without a Cause*)

A people's history of Hollywood's studios and the worldwide resistance to them – from the first talkies to the rise of digital, from class war in the 1940s San Fernando Valley to new independents in the US, UK, Mexico, Korea, Romania, Canada and France. Among scores of filmmakers interviewed: Mike Leigh, Gus Van Sant, Ken Loach, Miranda July, Park Chan-wook, Catherine Breillat. "The story of a global ideological clash... Recommended to aspiring filmmakers everywhere, with plenty of interest to film fans besides." *(Eye for Film)*

www.arsenalpulp.com

CLOSE UP

Wilder at heart

James Bell *raises a toast to Ray Milland and Barbara Stanwyck in a pair of Billy Wilder classics from the 1940s*

Double Indemnity

Billy Wilder; US 1944; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray; 108 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1; Features: Audio commentary by film historian Nick Redman and screenwriter Lem Dobbs; 'Shadows of Suspense' documentary; Screen Guild Theater radio adaptation; theatrical trailer; booklet featuring 1976 interview with Billy Wilder; extract from a 1976 interview with James M. Cain; extract from original screenplay depicting excised 'death chamber' ending.

The Lost Weekend

Billy Wilder; US 1945; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray; 101 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1; Features: video introduction by Alex Cox; three-part 1992 BBC Arena programme 'Billy, How Did You Do It?', featuring Volker Schlöndorff in conversation with Billy Wilder; 1946 Screen Guild Theater radio adaptation; original theatrical trailer; booklet featuring essay by David Cairns; vintage public service advertisement by Seagram's about 'The Lost Weekend' and the social dilemma of alcoholism.

What's your poison?: Doris Dowling and Ray Milland in 'The Lost Weekend'

Probably even to themselves, Billy Wilder and Charles Brackett made one of the most unlikely collaborative teams in Hollywood – Wilder was the diminutive, Jewish, hard-grafting ex-crime reporter newly arrived in the US having fled Hitler's Germany; the older Brackett was a member of the American aristocratic intelligentsia: the son of a senator, a metropolitan sophisticate who'd served as a critic for 'Vanity Fair' and the 'New Yorker'. And yet for nearly 15 years following their introduction in 1936, this mismatched pair formed one of the most productive partnerships of the studio era. They were celebrated initially as behind-the-scenes writers, crafting a string of hits for the likes of Ernst Lubitsch ('Ninotchka', 'Bluebeard's Eighth Wife'), Howard Hawks ('Ball of Fire'), and Mitchell Leisen ('Midnight', 'Arise My Love', 'Hold Back the Dawn'), and then, following Wilder's 1942 US directorial debut 'The Major and the Minor', co-written by Brackett, as a formidable filmmaking team in their own right.

Their differences inevitably caused friction, which grew over time, and they would split after winning their fourth shared Oscar for 'Sunset Blvd.' in 1950, but both freely acknowledged that the other pushed them to explore areas they wouldn't have alone.

However – perhaps in an indication of the differing regard in which 'pulp' was held between Europeans and Americans at the time – adapting James M. Cain's novella 'Double Indemnity', about an insurance man lured into murder by a manipulative temptress, was a step too far for Brackett, who considered Cain's writing beneath his talents and left the project after helping to write a treatment. Wilder then went to a fellow emigré living in Los Angeles, Raymond Chandler, who had his own snobberies, and who fought with Wilder throughout, but knew better than anybody the particularly American poetry and profound disquiet embedded in the 'tawdry' crime story.

'Double Indemnity', of course, needs no introduction as the cornerstone of film noir, but Masters of Cinema's new Blu-ray does it proud, capturing John F. Seitz's cinematography in its full glory; the dusty air of Phyllis Dietrichson's Spanish-style villa shimmering sharply in the bars of light cast by the Venetian blinds. What would become well-worn tropes in countless imitators are found here in irreducible freshness. Fred MacMurray was never much of an actor, but such was the luck or inspiration of the casting that his earnest schmuck is the perfect foil for Barbara Stanwyck's Phyllis – all other femmes fatales trail in her wake. Though always striking, not least in her outrageous blonde wig, the fact that Stanwyck was never one of the great screen beauties only adds to her character's sense of ruthlessness – she has to work to ensnare her prey. Any greater beauty would be out of

'The Lost Weekend' helped change the idea that alcoholism was due to character flaws, not sickness

MacMurray's league, just as any more assured man would be beyond hers.

Brackett returned for Wilder's next film, an adaptation of Charles Jackson's novel 'The Lost Weekend', about an alcoholic writer who recognises that he's drowning his talents, but is powerless to address his problem. Wilder read the book and felt it could make an important picture – "the first film with an alcoholic who isn't a comedian." As David Cairns notes in the booklet accompanying Masters of Cinema's Blu-ray, that's not strictly true, but the film did much to shift the engrained idea that alcoholism was the result of a character flaw and not a sickness – that alcoholics could be seen as sufferers and not merely losers.

That it succeeds in imparting that perception is due in no small part to Ray Milland's performance as Don Birnam, the alcoholic at the centre of the film. Milland had felt anxious about taking on the role, and had to be talked into it by Wilder, but he delivers the performance of his career, as was acknowledged when he won the Oscar for best actor in 1946.

Perhaps the most celebrated sequence in the film is one following Milland as he trawls downtown New York city streets desperately looking for a pawn shop to flog his typewriter so he can buy drink. Wilder, working again with Seitz, had cameramen hidden in boxes along 3rd Avenue as Milland, in character, stumbled through the unsuspecting public.

It's a stretch to call such scenes, as some have done, an equivalent to Italian neo-realism, but the use of real locations showing the unseen, grimy New York, as well as the frighteningly expressive, almost Wellesian passages portraying Birnam's nightmarish drink-induced hallucinations, was shocking for the time, and almost prompted Paramount to shelve the film. They relented, but Wilder and Brackett felt duty-bound to tack on a wholly unconvincing happy ending.

The many extras include 'Billy, How Did You Do It?', a fascinating, exhaustive five-hour-long series of interviews with Wilder by Volker Schlöndorff. Wilder was in his eighties at the time of filming, but his infectious energy is entirely undimmed; he swivels constantly in his chair, his hands animated throughout as he reminisces about his life and work.

Anatomy of a murder: Fred MacMurray and Barbara Stanwyck in 'Double Indemnity'

Bird of Paradise

King Vidor; US 1932; Kino Classics/ Region A Blu-ray; 82 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: trailers

Film: A superstar Hollywood auteur before the model was ever cast, King Vidor capitalised on his silent hits at MGM, *The Big Parade* and *The Crowd*, by going freelance in the early talkie era, and this tropical holiday is a project he did for David O. Selznick, shot on location in Hawaii (and in Culver City).

As an image-maker, Vidor distinguished himself by rarely doing anything halfway, and this is a polished and detailed excursion into the early-1930s Pacific-native melodrama that was enjoying a cultural-obsession surge at the time (alongside Tiki bars and other vacation-themed notions of Polynesia). The story is classic hokum: Joel McCrea, aboard a yacht of indulgent white men, falls in love with an island princess (Dolores del Rio), much to the chagrin of the native culture and, it's made clear, the isle's volcano god. But Vidor's energy is evident everywhere, from the magnificent tracking shot through the trees and behind the running natives, looking out into the wide bay, to the lovely, rather Vigoesque sequence in which McCrea, keeping night watch, is taunted and seduced in the black water by a nude-swimming del Rio. (A body stocking was likely employed, but the underwater sequences were about as sexy as 1932 got.)

It's not a terribly enlightened film, cross-culturally-speaking, idealising and simplifying the gorgeous, sweet-natured islanders just as Murnau's *Tabu* had the year before, and nowhere near as excoriating about the influence of white westerners as W.S. Van Dyke's Tahiti-set *White Shadows in the South Seas* (1928). Vidor and Selznick were going for the full matinee thrill, *sans* message, and their film is packed with dense visuals and immaculate process-shot set pieces (including a dismaying whirlpool and lava flow), as well as deft supporting-character performances, especially from the 'natives'. McCrea is his fine, earnest self, but the movie hinges on del Rio, who in talkies was never much of an actress, and is further saddled here with approximating a Polynesian accent and pidgin English (not to mention a good deal of very un-native eye makeup). Good thing, then, that she is such a mesmerisingly saucy vixen, if we may be so bold, half-nude and draped only with a strategic set of leis for most of the film, and justifying the film's touristy glow and sense of indulgence with every bare-backed hoochie-koo and relaxed romp through the jungle.
Disc: Taken from a preserved original nitrate print, the Blu-ray presentation is sterling. (MA)

The Black Panther

Ian Merrick; 1977 UK; BFI Flipside/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 18; 97 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: video-release trailer, French-language version, Bob Bentley short 'Recluse' (and location footage), hard-of-hearing subtitles, booklet including essays by Ian Merrick and screenwriter Michael Armstrong

The Black Panther An astute and responsible piece of storytelling whose undiluted authenticity contributes to its chilling potency

Film: A pristine release on disc for a title that barely had a chance in British cinemas. Notwithstanding a successful run in London's West End in early 1978, Ian Merrick's film was essentially hounded off screens in Birmingham and Hull by local councils, and a planned nationwide release was abandoned. The reason? It was only 18 months since Donald Neilson – branded 'the Black Panther' by the media – had been convicted of a string of murders, including that of 17-year-old heiress Lesley Whittle, whose emaciated body was discovered hanging in an underground drainage shaft in a Staffordshire park. Evidently, public sentiment towards this notorious killer was still running high, and suspicions that Merrick's celluloid reconstruction was some opportunist cash-in precluded any engagement with what was actually on screen.

Decades on, *The Black Panther* becomes a completely different prospect for a new generation unaware of Neilson's horrific exploits (unless, that is, they make the mistake of watching the tell-all trailer included as an extra). It would be an overstatement to claim that a neglected masterpiece awaits them, but this micro-budget production remains an astute and responsible piece of storytelling whose undiluted authenticity contributes to its chilling potency.

Screenwriter Michael Armstrong set himself the challenge – possibly for sound legal reasons – of not including any detail that wasn't verifiable through court or police transcripts and press interviews, while the real-life locations, unshowy direction and Donald Sumpter's restrained central performance achieve a forensic clarity in chronicling armed robber Neilson's military methods and their murderous outcome. All this suggests a certain non-judgemental reserve, yet actually the film shows a real trust in the audience to make the connections between Neilson's British Army combat experience in various colonial endgame hot spots and his detached attitude to his victims, and indeed to sense the burning economic resentment behind his crimes. Although ostensibly focused on specifics, the film conversely suggests the extent of Britain's dysfunction during the turbulent 1970s and, without overstating the case, hints that Neilson's psychotic rage was not unremoved from the national discomfort at social change and reduced status on the global stage.
Discs: A truthfully grainy rendition of the print on the Blu-ray, director-approved from his original negative. Given intriguing factual circumstances surrounding the production and the real-life events, a commentary track might have proved more useful than the alternative French-language dub, though there's a worthwhile booklet. Still, the overall package provides a strong showing for what was essentially a lost film. (TJ)

Flight of fancy: 'Bird of Paradise'

Gunman in the Streets

Frank Tuttle; US/France 1950; Palladium/ Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 86 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: picture gallery

Film: Frank Tuttle's Paris-set thriller is an intriguing if uneven affair which looks back to Hollywood *noir* but also has a pronounced Gallic flavour reminiscent of *Rififi* or even Jean-Pierre Melville or Marcel Carné.

As Eddie Roback, the escaped criminal on the run, Dane Clark both dresses like Bogart and tries to emulate his sneering delivery, while Simone Signoret reprises her familiar role as a melancholic femme fatale. The publicity claims that the film was shot entirely on location, but certain scenes are stilted and seem very studio-bound. Still, veteran Hollywood director Tuttle knows how to crank up the tension, and this is essentially a chase movie: whether escaping from a department store as the cops close in by grabbing a child and pretending he's the father, or posing as a photographer and hiding his face behind a huge camera, the escaped man shows cunning and utter ruthlessness in his attempts to save himself. The film rounds off in satisfying fashion with a *White Heat*-style gun battle in which the gangster takes on a small army of gendarmes. Renowned cinematographers Claude Renoir (nephew of Jean Renoir and later to shoot *French Connection II* and *The Spy Who Loved Me*) and Eugen Schüfftan have a flair for moody compositions.

One guesses that the film's themes of loyalty and betrayal had a very personal resonance for Tuttle, who was notorious for naming names to the House Un-American Activities Committee.
Disc: Given that this is the first time the film has been released on DVD in its original version, it's disappointing that the extras extend only to a picture gallery with various posters. It would have been fascinating to learn some of the background – especially why Tuttle ended up directing a film in France, just as several of those he testified against during the HUAC hearings did. Image quality is a little soft and grainy. (GM)

The Hound of the Baskervilles

Igor Maslennikov; USSR 1981; Mr Bongo/ Region 0 DVD; Certificate PG; 146 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1

Film: Since Britons emerge from the womb with a solid working knowledge

BFI STILLS, POSTERS AND DESIGNS (3)/KOBAL COLLECTION (1)

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of the most famous Sherlock Holmes mystery, whether via the original or two dozen subsequent adaptations, any newcomer to the UK marketplace faces stiff competition – but this Soviet version deserves its lofty domestic reputation. In particular, it's easy to see why the mockingly quizzical Vasily Livanov is regarded as one of the more convincing screen Sherlocks, though Vitaly Solomin's sandy-haired Watson keeps things ticking over nicely during the long Holmes-free section in the middle. Originally broadcast in two parts on Soviet television and subsequently released in cinemas, it's an intelligent, well-staged version that feels brisker than its running time and is generally very faithful to the text. Inevitably, there are considerable extra pleasures for British viewers, not all necessarily intentional. Victorian London looks distinctly Mitteleuropean, an effect augmented by names like 'Charing Crosski Gospital', and Nikita Mikhalkov plays Sir Genry Baskerville (sic) as comic relief, slapping his forehead emphatically with his remaining unpurloined boot and voicing a pathological loathing of oatmeal at every opportunity. Meanwhile, the presence of Oleg Yankovsky (*Mirror*, *Nostalgia*) as Stapleton lends a distinctly Tarkovskian quality to his monologue about the perils of the Great Grimpen Mire.
Discs: This 30-year-old TV series hasn't been restored but is very watchable, and the subtitler has clearly read Conan Doyle (ie "a gigantic hound" rather than "an enormous dog"). Each episode gets its own disc, though both could easily have fitted on one. (MB)

House of Tolerance

Bertrand Bonello; France 2011; Universal/ Region 2 DVD; Certificate 18, 125 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: 'making of' documentary, cast interviews

Film: Bertrand Bonello's film was the best of 2011 in my book, the loathing expressed by many British critics notwithstanding (our Continental counterparts were far more accommodating). It portrays the last days of a luxury brothel or *maison close* in Paris at the twilight of the 19th century, a lethargic, claustrophobic space faithfully reconstructed from historical documents, where time seems to be suspended.

This sensual hothouse is inhabited by a family of sorts – comprising 12 prostitutes, the madam and her two children. The narrative is constructed around the juxtaposition of their day/night activities, threaded by one particular woman's recurring nightmare of a violent attack by a client which unravels in backwards temporal loops; her mutilated presence imbricates everyday gestures with a sense of the uncanny. The film's surreal, dreamlike atmosphere seems indebted to Lynch and Buñuel, and is enhanced by glitches in perspective, playbacks and split screens, as the camera follows the women up and down the labyrinthine dark corridors that lead to the illusory intimacy of their boudoirs.

Expressing the desire to be "as close as possible to the women", Bonello gives them a dignity that sees them rise above their daily humiliations; they are quite literally prisoners in a gilded cage, where everything is under the strict control of the madam. Bonello manages to conjure a palpable sense of complicity and camaraderie among the women, most arrestingly in a beautiful pastoral sequence during their annual day out in the countryside. The corrupted air that these prostitutes inhale daily – a decadent mixture of opium fumes, bodily fluids, champagne and the women's signature perfumes – is reinforced by the oversaturated heaviness of the velvety interiors. It is from the contrast between the beauty of the images and the muted cruelty of their situation that the most grotesque side of male sadism emerges.

Unsurprisingly, the gaze (both from behind and in front of the camera) is predominantly female. The film was shot by Josée Deshaies, Bonello's wife, who successfully transforms the painterly qualities of the tableaux – carefully concocted by the madam for male consumption – into the most thickly suffocating environment imaginable. A constant multisensory hyper-alertness, not dissimilar to that which permeates the films of Lucrecia Martel, is also expressed through an evocative, painstakingly detailed sound design, ranging from the piercingly metallic popping open of corsets and the rustling of the girls' clothes and bedsheets to the high-pitched, otherworldly sound of the top of a glass of champagne being rubbed with a finger. The music soundtrack is deliciously, strikingly anachronistic. The whole film plays with ideas of performance and theatricality, whereby ritualised sex acts become a calculated self-representation comparable to the work of an actor. Each girl has a work name, and masks and role-play feature strongly during the most disturbing sequences. In the end, it is all an illusion, not only the clients' sexual fantasies but also the girls' own impossible dreams of independence and freedom.
Disc: The extras illustrate the sheer craft involved in making this film, as well as helpfully introducing Bonello, largely unknown in the UK. (MDD)

BFI STILLS, POSTERS AND DESIGNS (2)

Unequal rights: 'The Lawless'

The Lawless

Joseph Losey; US 1950; Olive Films/ Region 1 NTSC DVD; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1

Film: If there are any Losey completists left, here's a gift for them – Losey's virtually forgotten second feature (it's not even mentioned by David Thomson, a dedicated Losey analyser, in *The Biographical Dictionary of Film*), made when the director was still three fast movies and less than two years away from seeking European sanctuary from the HUAC machine. In fact, the movie might be the diehard leftist's most politically impassioned – a steel-nerved indictment of racism and minority inequity, taking on the ever-prescient issue of Mexican-American relations and pre-dating Michael Wilson's *Salt of the Earth* by four years.

Independently produced (by B-movie factory 'Dollar Bills' William Pine and William Thomas) and shot on location, the film broadly limns a small town divided – colour-wise and by wealth – between 'fruit tramps' and the well-off whites (who are the 'lawless' of the title). Losey cuts to the bone with a single cut, between a Mexican teen's outdoor shower out of a tin can and a white teen's bathroom ministrations in an ivy-covered mansion. Brawls ensue, a Mexican kid gets chased for assault and steals a car, bad luck mounts and soon, thanks to the sensationalist TV and radio hacks

hollering about mad-dog criminality, a bigoted riot is in the offing.

Caught in the middle are Macdonald Carey's weathered journalist Larry Wilder, just recently come to town to run its newspaper and interested only in recapturing his childhood dream of suburbia, and Gail Russell (her faint Chicana makeup making her giant languorous eyes even more startling) as his opposite number, a crusading Mexican-American reporter for the town's scrubby Spanish-language paper. Their budding romance is crippled by principles, of which he has few left, and it's their evolving relationship that ages best, as the question of progressive political commitment runs right up against conservative-style nostalgia. The townspeople themselves – once the car-overturning mayhem begins in earnest – destroy Wilder's idealised vision of small-town tranquillity, especially once they descend on the newspaper offices like a tornado.

The nexus between race, class and the media is fairly complex, and is of course still pertinent to what's happening in American politics, particularly in the states along the Mexican border. The film was salient enough in 1950 to get it quickly yanked from theatres by Paramount, but at least it was made and screened – today, the equivalent would be a video doc seen only in the Human Rights Watch Film Festival.
Disc: Fine transfer, no extras. (MA)

The Ledge

Matthew Chapman; US 2011, Universal/ Region 2 DVD; 97 minutes; Certificate 15; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: trailer, 'Behind the Ledge'

Film: Matthew Chapman, the great-great-grandson of Charles Darwin (about whom he has written two books), is one of those fascinating figures who exist on the margins of cinema. Aside from writing the screenplays for *Color of Night* (1994) and *Runaway Jury* (2003), Chapman has created a slim directorial oeuvre (five films in three decades) which includes *Strangers Kiss* (1983), a modern *noir* about the making of Stanley Kubrick's *Killer's Kiss* (starring Peter Coyote as 'Stanley'), and *Heart of Midnight* (1988), an erotic thriller that works a series of variations on Kubrick's *The Shining*.

His latest film, *The Ledge*, appears after an appropriately Kubrickian gap of 23 years but mines much the same vein. The plot involves an atheist, Gavin (Charlie Hunnam), who falls in love with Shana (Liv Tyler), the wife of religious fundamentalist Joe (Patrick Wilson, especially good as another of those domineering yet emotionally vulnerable males whom Peter Coyote has twice played for Chapman). This perfectly scaled piece mostly takes place in a few small rooms, a hotel, and the ledge of a building from which Joe has commanded Gavin to jump in order to save Shana's life. But the outwardly circumscribed series of locations is precisely what enables Chapman to express his wider concerns, his characters spending much of the

The banned played on

Czechs and balance: 'Capricious Summer'

The Czech New Wave tackled totalitarian life with disarming wit and absurdist metaphor, writes **Michael Atkinson**

Pearls of the Czech New Wave

Pearls of the Deep/Daisies/ A Report on the Party and Guests/Return of the Prodigal Son/Capricious Summer/The Joke

Vera Chytilová, Jaromil Jires, Jirí Menzel, Jan Nemec, Evald Schorm; Czechoslovakia 1965-69; Criterion Eclipse/Region 1 NTSC DVD; 107/76/71/103/77/81 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1

Cinema's own belle époque, the New Wave era continues to fascinate not only because filmmaking went on an explosive international tear, and not only because for the first time movies weren't celebrating the past or idealising the future, but were zeroing in on the youth-drunk, rule-rewriting now. It was also politics, as a pressurising influence on the movies and as the furious movies themselves, which revealed itself as one fresh aspect of the 1960s-70s moment that changed everything and can never be repeated. The entirety of Eastern Europe, of course, had a top-down mass psychosis to wrestle with at the time, and the Czech Wave did it most poignantly, defying the authorities with disarming intimacy and absurdist metaphor.

This Criterion Eclipse package comes front-loaded with the all-but-forgotten omnibus 'Pearls of the Deep', comprising five shorts directed by movement powerhouses Jirí Menzel, Jan Nemec, Evald Schorm, Vera Chytilová and Jaromil Jires, all based on semi-surrealist tales by national literary lion Bohumil Hrabal. Scaldingly farcical, the films look totalitarian life square in the eye, but they're also living testaments to the era's loveable, grungy Euro-slacker esprit. The standout chunk – perhaps because it seems to risk the bank – is Chytilová's wicked comedy about an all-night beer-café turned upside down by the appearance of a corpse, but all five films are compelling time capsules.

The five filmmakers are also represented each by a feature. Truly, no other New Wave ever had anything resembling Chytilová's 'Daisies', an epochal exercise in individualistic-feminist resistance, executed with a frenetic degree of norm-meltdown that's still exhilarating to watch. Of course, it's actually just a prank, but Sacha Baron-Cohen owes everything to its simple non-narrative: two giggling young women, both named Marie, irrationally cavort at high speeds through conventional society, treating trad norms, rituals, food and their own bodies like so many meaningless feathers in the wind. It's not a story, it's a scary dance party, a message of freedom, and it's hard to imagine a communist bureaucrat who wouldn't want to hide it in a vault forever.

Far more orthodox, Evald Schorm's 'Return of the Prodigal Son' begins with a title that disavows any resemblance to persons living or dead: "Life isn't like this." It's a tongue-in-cheek pronouncement applicable to the New Wave's entire output until the Soviet tanks shut down the Prague Spring in 1968, but here the matter is grim: after a suicide attempt, a hospitalised engineer struggles to reconnect to life, which includes his child, his luscious and unfaithful wife, his patient psychiatrist, and the doctor's seductive, unhinged, middle-aged wife. It is modern alienation unfortunately sans the wit or invention of metaphors, and it's also apolitical, more or less, as is Jirí Menzel's 'Capricious Summer', a nevertheless entrancing trifle fuelled by its maker's characteristic bonhomie, hedonism and proudly pre-feminist ideas about sex. Three swollen middle-aged schlubs – a beer-bellied lout, a reverend and an academic bachelor – enjoy a lakeside summer idyll arguing ironically about nonsense until their sang-froid is ruptured by the arrival of a travelling acrobat and his lovely young 'assistant'. As with all of Menzel, be it a minor daydream or a deft masterpiece, his dry, lusty, irreverent voice makes it a worthwhile trip.

Politics hits the front burner with Jaromil Jires's 'The Joke' and Jan Nemec's magisterial 'A Report on the Party and Guests' – films so openly lacerating about life under totalitarian control that it's hard to believe they ever got made, Spring or no Spring. Jires's film, from the Milan Kundera novel, details the spiralling damage done by an ill-advised quip on a balding loser, as it turns him into a counter-revolutionary felon and steers him into a lonely middle age, when he happens on the opportunity to exact revenge on the functionaries who locked him up years before. Predictably, the film was withdrawn, and Jires went on to far less incendiary projects; not to be outdone, Nemec's 'Report' was banned twice, before and after the Russians invaded. Easily the reigning masterwork on view here, this brisk Ionesco-style nightmare plays out the social reality of irrational power and collaborative weakness in the context of a picnic subsumed by mysterious strangers. Everything about the film is totemic, from the graphic density of its visuals to the identities of many 'guests' – including Schorm, composer Jan Klusák, author Josef Skvorecky and activist Dana Nemcova – many of whom were persecuted or self-exiled after 1968.

The entirety of Eastern Europe had a top-down mass psychosis to wrestle with at the time

NOZONE

Study in blues

John Cassavetes's follow-up to 'Shadows' was a mood-music melodrama about love, loss and all that jazz. By **Tim Lucas**

Bad timing: Everett Chambers, Stella Stevens and Bobby Darin in 'Too Late Blues'

Too Late Blues

John Cassavetes; US 1961; Olive Films/ Region A Blu-ray and Region 1 DVD; 101 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.78:1

Art direction by Hal Pereira, costumes by Edith Head, music by David Raksin ('Laura') and special photographic effects by John P. Fulton, the man who parted the Red Sea in 'The Ten Commandments' – it doesn't sound like a John Cassevetes film, does it? Cassavetes himself later disowned this, his second directorial effort after 1959's independent breakthrough 'Shadows' and his first major studio production, but it's a testament to his work on the picture that he's the only one of those towering names to look like he got anywhere near the set.

The loose script of this mood-music melodrama was co-written by Cassavetes and Richard Carr (a writer on his 'Johnny Staccato' television series) in a single weekend, in hasty preparation for a looming meeting with Paramount, who shocked them by greenlighting it with a start date only two weeks away. The director wanted his wife Gena Rowlands and Montgomery Clift for the two leads; he got recording artist Bobby Darin (who won a Golden Globe for his screen debut in 'Come September' that same year) and Stella Stevens, as the studio had promised her a chance to work with Clift if she would first appear opposite Elvis Presley in 'Girls! Girls! Girls!' – an abuse of her trust that doubtless added shadings of wariness and weariness to what is probably the finest performance she ever gave.

The title specifies blues, because this is the story of a jazz combo so out there they don't need to play it. Darin plays pianist John 'Ghost' Wakefield, the leader and visionary of the group, whose maverick musings have led them to a penniless career of performing in orphanages and public parks. At a party, Ghost meets up with an old acquaintance, a buzz-cutted agent named Benny Flowers (Everett Chambers) who seems devoted to publicly embarrassing and down-dressing Jessica Polanski (Stevens), a beautiful client who specialises in melismatic vocalising – what one unpolished character aptly terms "that no-singing singing". Ghost and Jess split to a working-class bar, where he presents his down-to-earth approach to life and people. But when he follows her to her motel apartment, it becomes apparent that this shopworn angel is accustomed to being treated like a whore. Ghost leaves her all but untouched with the promises of future work and meaningful romance, and is so

Stella Stevens is lit for a greatness that never quite came to call

inspired that he allows Benny to book them a recording session dominated by Jess's appropriately ghostly arias. But the taste of success makes Ghost nervous, and when he turns cowardly and fails to defend Jess in a pool-hall fight, embarrassed in front of his mates, he runs... and doesn't come back until she's taken one of them on as her next lover. In the way of melodramas of this period, our hero immolates his ego as best he can by selling out as a gigolo to an ageing, jazz-loving countess (Marilyn Clark), before self-disgust propels him to make one last play for Jess and the quintet he left high and dry.

Darin isn't especially remembered as an actor, and 'Too Late Blues' offers some explanation. Under Cassavetes's direction, he's more than merely competent, at ease on camera and believable in the full range of his line readings, but his face has an unmarked, newly minted passivity that doesn't hold up to study for a full hundred minutes. Slumping over his piano, Ghost is the only beta male in his own band. Stevens, on the other hand, is lit for a greatness that never quite came to call. This was Stevens's great year, and Cassavetes's film posits her equidistantly between the Presley picture and Jerry Lewis's 'The Nutty Professor', and it's obvious that Lewis spent some time studying Stevens before writing the role of Stella Purdy. Jess and Stella are cut from the same gossamer cloth; they are both dreamy jukebox leaners whom we see nursing cigarettes while adoring from a side stool the piano-tinkling dreamers in their lives. (There is also a first-date scene in which Ghost shows off for Jess by concocting the cocktail to end all cocktails, comparable to Lewis's 'Alaskan Polar Bear Heater' routine.)

Cassavetes stocks his film's atmosphere with strong support, including Vince Edwards, Val Avery, Nick Dennis (the '3D Pow!' mechanic from 'Kiss Me Deadly'), Ivan Dixon, June Wilkinson and longtime associate Seymour Cassel, but the most riveting character is Benny Flowers, one of the most snarling, dangerously self-loathing agents ever depicted in a showbiz story. It's the only performance the undersung Everett Chambers (actor, director and longtime producer, starting with Cassavetes's 'Johnny Staccato' show) ever gave in a feature film, which is a terrible waste of talent.

Cassavetes maintained that Paramount tampered with the film after he turned it in, and there are hints, for anyone attuned to his open-ended pacing, that certain scenes and shots were chopped off at the knees to keep the story, such as it is, moving forward. That said, there is an invigorating, sprawling, spontaneous feel about the pool-hall sequences which makes the whole worthier of attention, both as entertainment and history, in that they embody the most clear-cut cinematic precedent for much of what Martin Scorsese pursued and made his own in 'Mean Streets' (1973).

Olive Films' no-frills release, available on DVD and Blu-ray, is handsomely rendered in anamorphic 1.78:1. The velvety monochrome cinematography, equally adaptable to earthy location shooting and nightclub fantasy, was the work of Lionel Lindon, likewise carried over from 'Johnny Staccato' (and also John Frankenheimer's regular DP through to 1966's 'Grand Prix'). The soundtrack features the input of such jazz greats as Red Mitchell, Benny Carter and Shelly Manne – all of them, like Cassavetes, doing what they can with what they've got.

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running time debating the need to believe in God, the function of faith and the meaning of existence (an echo, perhaps, of the writer-director's more famous ancestor). These thematic ambitions are well served by Chapman's *mise en scène*, his camera prowling through corridors in a way that transforms these concrete spaces into labyrinths embodying abstract mysteries. Chapman, a British filmmaker who moved to America, thus reversing Kubrick's journey, here seems to have found his way back to *The Shining* by way of *Eyes Wide Shut*, with which *The Ledge* shares a protagonist whose sexual infidelities lead him into a realm where sexuality has been conflated with death.

The film is admittedly imperfect: a subplot involving a police officer played by Terrence Howard is essentially disposable. But *The Ledge*'s flaws end up adding to its charm, aligning it with a B-movie tradition associated not with formal perfection but rather with the expression of imaginative energies – which, now more than ever, tend to be ruthlessly eliminated from most mainstream Hollywood productions. **Disc:** The sound and image are both first-rate. Aside from a trailer, the only extra is a rather scrappy documentary consisting of interviews with the three male leads. (BS)

Lost Keaton

Various directors; US 1934-37; Kino/ Region 1 Blu-ray and DVD; 306 minutes total; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: booklet, stills gallery, 'Why They Call Him Buster' montage of pratfalls and stunts

Films: The story of Buster Keaton's ill fortunes in the sound era was well enough known to make him a *Sunset Blvd.* punchline, but he did not, as it were, go quietly. After a creatively stifled run at MGM, cut short by a drinking problem, and a brief artist-in-exile stint abroad, Keaton signed with Earle W. Hammons's Educational Pictures (bizarre motto: 'The Spice of the Program'), where, between 1934-37, he produced the 16 fast-and-cheap two-reelers packaged in Kino's Blu-ray release of the 2010 restorations.

Almost invariably, Keaton plays an accident-prone, universally disrespected shrimp named Elmer – last in the chow line in *Tars and Stripes*, sheriff of an empty town in *The Gold Ghost*, the runt of a litter of moonshiners (the Keaton family) in *Palooka from Paducah* – who nevertheless rallies to get the girl, here either blonde Dorothea Kent or brunette Lona Andre.

The paucity of means shows, and Keaton is often just comedically treading water on screen, but at 40 he's still a man of steel in knockabout stuff. Each film has at least a moment, while some are rough gems: 1935's *Hayseed Romance* is particularly well sustained, with a fluid progression of bad-to-worse-to-awful as Keaton's trouble with an overhead attic light snowballs into catastrophe. Justly the best known in the collection is 1936's *Grand Slam Opera*, which has Buster dexterously

practising a balancing act in his boarding-house room, irritating pretty downstairs neighbour Diana Lewis, in a burlesque of Astaire and Rogers's *Top Hat* meet-cute of the year before.

Taking these shorts as historical curios, it is interesting to see Keaton reacting to the pop culture and the straitened circumstances of the 1930s – though his own depression is often as evident as the Depression.

Disc: David Macleod, founder of UK Keaton society the Blinking Buzzards, pens a helpful booklet identifying the previous shorts from which Keaton is repurposing his gags. The quality is as good as possible, although it varies from film to film – some are sourced from dupes, others negatives – reflecting the scattered destiny of Educational's holdings after its 1940 bankruptcy. (NP)

Films by Mizoguchi Kenji

Oyu-sama/Ugetsu monogatari/ Gion bayashi/Sansho dayu

Japan 1951/53/53/54; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray and DVD Dual Format (DVD NTSC); Certificate PG; 93/102/85/124 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1; Features: Tony Rayns introductions

Films: Despite the mix-and-match settings (two historical, two modern), these four films from the first part of Mizoguchi's Daiei period go very well together, largely because they all explore facets of one of his perennial themes: the mistreatment of women through the ages, whether through neglect (the would-be samurai in *Ugetsu* pursues his implausible ambition regardless of his wife's more fundamental economic needs), exploitation (the vicious slave traders in *Sansho*) or employment as a geisha ("We are living works of art," new trainees are optimistically assured at the start of *Gion bayashi*, while the teenage Eiko's fate is being sealed by others). Consistency is added by the presence of Tanaka Kinuyo in three of the films. In *Oyu-sama* she plays the 'Miss Oyu' of the title, a middle-aged widow who is forbidden by tradition to remarry but who persuades her beloved to marry her sister in order to bring him into the family. In *Ugetsu* she's the woman left behind when her entrepreneurial husband unwittingly falls for a ghost; and in *Sansho* she's the mother of two small children, forced to watch them grow into adulthood as slaves. All this is observed through lengthy takes, choreographically intricate on both sides of the camera, often astonishingly beautiful (*Ugetsu*'s watery voyage in the fog, *Sansho*'s deceptively tranquil landscapes), but any suggestion that Mizoguchi prioritises aesthetic issues over human/moral ones is banished by the way in which a major character is dispatched in *Ugetsu* so callously casually that it's initially unclear what has happened.

Discs: Released as two separate double-bills

Ugetsu monogatari Choreographically intricate on both sides of the camera, it is often astonishingly beautiful – in particular the watery voyage in the fog

(*Ugetsu*/*Oyu-sama*, *Sansho*/*Gion bayashi*), all four films merit the Blu-ray upgrade, and if this makes damage more pronounced at times (*Ugetsu* is peppered with fine scratches), the additional detail amply compensates: the Buddhist prayers painted on to the back of *Ugetsu*'s hapless protagonist Genjuro now glisten in a way they never did on DVD. *Oyu-sama* and *Gion bayashi* come across best, presumably because the source materials have undergone less wear, but all these transfers do the films ample justice. Extras comprise typically comprehensive Tony Rayns video contextualisations (one for each film), plus booklets with translations of the source stories. (MB)

Numéro deux/Ici et ailleurs

Jean-Luc Godard; France 1975/76; Olive Films/Region 1 DVD; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1

Films: Here we have cinema's postmodern Galileo deep into his self-anointed heresy phase, having emerged from the 1960s as the New Wave era's most iconic voice only to disconnect himself from commercial filmmaking by decade's end, forming the anonymous collective Dziga Vertov Group. By now, the mid-1970s, the DVG had dissipated and Godard had entered into his vast middle phase, when his Promethean interrogatory will wrestled directly with the unholy alliance between political injustice and media meaning. Both these films are fragmented, pun-rife essays on the nature of unknowability in a world controlled by corporate commercialism, but each explores different terrain.

Numéro deux – the title refers to the excretory function – is set entirely within a cluttered media room/projector booth full of monitors and mixing decks, as the army-jacketed, cigar-pounding auteur contemplates the nexus of modern life where gender presuppositions, family roles and personal politics cross, scenarios and images often running on multiple video screens at once. Often outrageously juxtaposing porn with images of children (and in one scene even having its paradigmatic bickering-bourgeois parents demonstrate their genital functions to their kids), the film never stops talking, about power and capitalism and women's roles, finally demanding that they resort to "revolt and irresponsibility" to evade the categorisations of patriarchy.

Ici et ailleurs is even testier, and could be said to be the final Dziga Vertov Group film, edited as it is by Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville from footage that Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin shot in Palestine in 1970 for the unfinished *Jusqu'à la victoire*. Given that the earlier film went uncompleted because of the PLO's losses in the 'Black September' that same year, Godard and Miéville's final appropriation is as much a laceration of Israeli policy (equations to Nazi Germany are frequent) as the act of filming the Palestinians was to begin with and hoping for an understanding of their struggle. The film incorporates scads of other news footage: "Death is represented in this film by a flow of images," Godard intones, blisteringly cynical about the process and the convenient conclusions we come to as viewers. Talking about how movies are actually politically constructed consciousness, Godard asks, "How do you arrange a chain of space-time?" and then says, "Like` this" (image of severed Vietnamese heads), "Like this" (Auschwitz), "Like this" (advertising), and so on. An hour long but righteous and fierce, it's one of Godard's clearest and most upsetting essays.

Discs: Fine editions of roughly made video-films, which serve as their own exegesis. (MA)

Lickerish: 'Surviving Life'

Films by Jan Svankmajer

Conspirators of Pleasure

Czech Republic 1996; New Wave Films/ Region 2 DVD; 82 minutes; Aspect Ratio 4:3; Features: photo gallery

Lunacy

Czech Republic 2005; New Wave Films/ Region 2 DVD; 90 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9; Features: making-of documentary, photo gallery

Surviving Life

Czech Republic 2010; New Wave Films/ Region 2 DVD; 100 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9; Features: three documentaries, alternative ending, trailers, photo gallery

Films: In the 1980s, when his work was regularly shown on Channel 4, Czech surrealist and animator Jan Svankmajer became well known in the UK, and in recent years much of his work has been released here on DVD (including a BFI set of his collected shorts). These three films, however, have never before been available on DVD in the UK.

Conspirators of Pleasure is a live-action film (albeit with various stop-motion sequences) about the autoerotic activities of a group of solitary fetishists. It plays almost like a spy movie, since the characters are all furtive in the extreme about their activities, which range from creating papier-mâché chicken heads out of pieces of pornography to constructing self-pleasure machines to use when their favourite newsreader is on TV. Svankmajer delights in taking a very matter-of-fact, deadpan approach to outlandish subject-matter – the fetishists are all determinedly ordinary types who don't show obvious emotion, and are as obsessed with machinery and totemic objects (fur, tubes, candles, masks, fish, brushes) as with sex itself. The use of solemn classical music on the soundtrack adds to the disorienting effect, though nothing in the film matches the sheer lewdness of the 18th-century pornographic drawings used over the opening credits. Ghoulish, visually arresting and often very funny, the film still seems more like a series of sketches strung together than a narrative feature.

Lunacy is Svankmajer's foray into Sadean territory. The director appears on screen at the start to tell us that the film is "an infantile tribute to Edgar

RONALD GRANT ARCHIVE/© BFI STILLS, POSTERS AND DESIGNS (1)

NEW RELEASES

Allan Poe" as well as to de Sade – we then see stop-frame footage of a pig spilling its innards. Depicting life inside an asylum, Svankmajer uses his familiar stop-frame animation techniques to heighten the eeriness and sheer oddity of this world: whenever meat appears, it is invariably moving – writhing or squirming across tables – while beautifully shot flights of lyricism are thrown in alongside the grotesquerie. There's clearly an allegorical subtext, but it's hard to work out quite what it is.

Surviving Life, which Svankmajer dubs a psychoanalytical comedy, begins even more disarmingly: the director tells us in his foreword that he couldn't raise enough cash to make the film he wanted to, and claims that he has deliberately extended the introduction because otherwise the film would be too short to qualify as a feature. Instead of live action, he uses cutout animation – but since the film is far more visually striking than it would have been as a straight live-action drama, it's hard to know how seriously to take his claims of impoverishment. The story concerns Eugene (Václav Helsus), a middle-aged man who, in his dream life, fantasises about a beautiful young woman. These dream sequences are full of typically startling imagery – a teddy bear with an erection, a narrow street out of whose windows hens are poking their heads. Bossed around by his stern wife, and with a dreary deskbound job, Eugene becomes more and more obsessed with his dream woman, who falls pregnant. There are grotesque close-ups of food and of the hapless Eugene vomiting; when he visits a psychoanalyst, a photograph of Sigmund Freud sticks out its tongue at him. Much more dialogue-based than most of the director's work, *Surviving Life* nonetheless touches on many of his pet obsessions – among them love, lust, voyeurism, grief, incontinence and the richness of the subconscious life.
Discs: The films come, as you'd expect, with plenty of provocative extras – making-of documentaries, trailers and photo galleries. (GM)

Films by Frank Tashlin

It's Only Money

US 1962; Olive Films/Region 1 Blu-ray and DVD; 83 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.77:1

Who's Minding the Store?

US 1963; Olive Films/Region 1 Blu-ray and DVD; 90 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.77:1

Films: There is a scene in *Who's Minding the Store?* in which Fritz Feld force-feeds spoonfuls of fried ants to Jerry Lewis, who barely suppresses a gag at this dubious delicacy. So too the piquantly maudlin and pungently antisocial art of Lewis is an acquired taste – one that's worth developing a cast-iron stomach for, for in Lewis's ungirdled id and flagrant disregard for comfort zones there is a sophisticated primitivism whose ridiculousness frequently reaches for the sublime.

Lewis was still going strong this March when celebrating his 86th birthday at New York City's 92nd St Y in a Friars Club-sponsored extravaganza, and his legacy is likewise looking good, as Olive Films of Illinois continues with God's work, burning the Lewis filmography on to disc.

The latest haul comprises two of Lewis's 1960s Paramount collaborations with mentor Frank Tashlin, the former Hal Roach gag man and Looney Tunes director who found his ideal flesh-and-blood cartoon in Lewis when they collided on the set of 1955's *Artists and Models*. In *It's Only Money* and *Store?*, released at the same time as Lewis was launching his own auteur career, Jerry plays a frog prince of sorts, a schlep whose true strength of character is only recognised by the woman who loves him. In *Money*, Jerry's a savant electronics repairman owed a massive inheritance by long-lost aunt Mae Questel (former vaudevillian and voice of Betty Boop), which makes him the target of fortune-hunting assassins. In *Store?*, Jerry's unknowingly courting the disguised heiress to a department store's millions while working at the chain's flagship location, being put through the dirty-job wringer by would-be mother-in-law Agnes Moorehead. These rent-a-plots provide playing fields for Jerry's fuddled grammar, orangutan shuffle, unmotivated reaction shots and acts of total chaos – a personal favourite being his unleashing of a black-hole vacuum cleaner in *Store?*. Also seen in both films is the 'Sincere Breakdown', in which Jerry lowers his voice a register, bats tear-dewed eyelashes, and denudes himself like an emotional ecdysiast, bumping and grinding his bare neediness towards the audience. (See also the astonishing-in-every-sense-of-the-word 1958 Lewis-Tashlin collaboration *The Geisha Boy*, unleashed by Olive in February.)

Both films, finally, leave us with the irresolvable dilemmas of the paradoxical Lewis persona, not least of which is: how can all the down-on-their-luck nincompoops he plays afford to keep themselves in pinkie rings and manicures?
Discs: The transfers are only as good as they need to be, while the no-frills presentation is as straightforward as Lewis's performances are insanely ornate. (NP)

Walking Tall: The Trilogy

Walking Tall/Walking Tall Part 2/ Final Chapter: Walking Tall

Phil Karlson/Earl Bellamy/Jack Starrett; US 1973/75/77; Shout! Factory/Region 1 Blu-ray and DVD; 124/109/112 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.78:1/1.85:1/1.85:1; Features: 'The Buford Pusser Story' documentary featurette

Films: Phil Karlson, the director of some exceptional *films noirs* (*99 River Street*, *Kansas City Confidential*) who had been struggling with ill-fitting material through the 1960s, came back to concuss the American drive-in consciousness with his penultimate picture, *Walking Tall*. Bing Crosby Productions handed Karlson a living folk hero for a subject: Buford Pusser, elected sheriff of McNairy County, Tennessee, on a crusading anti-vice ticket, a white-trash Hercules who cleaned out the Augean stables of his hometown while surviving scores of attempts on his life.

Walking Tall was released in 1973, with the so-called Dixie Mafia that Pusser had publicly battled still running up a body count, and it seemed so contemporary as to be street reportage. This only proves how little things change south of the Mason-Dixon Line, for Karlson was practically remaking his 1955 *The Phenix City Story*, which dramatised the assassination of Alabama attorney general nominee Albert Patterson. Famously, Karlson had *Phenix City* lead John McIntire dress in Patterson's actual clothing; this could be cynically read as a publicity stunt for the movie magazines, as might be the whole story of *Walking Tall* (a former pro-wrestler, 'Buford the Bull' Pusser certainly knew something about ballyhoo), but there's a real, burning sense of outrage behind these films.

More than any picture of its time, *Phenix City* gave the lowdown on unchecked violence in the Jim Crow-era South. *Walking Tall*, set on the same Tallahatchie River from which Emmett Till was dragged, is likewise a rib-cracker of a movie, offering a palpable sense of the human cost extracted in pursuing justice all the way down the line, structured as a sequence of escalating reprisals of injured pride exchanged by law and outlaw, with bystanders ground up between them. Texas-born Joe Don Baker, a sly-grinning brick wall of an actor, gives Pusser a sullen gravity, while the tremulous and very affecting Elizabeth Hartman plays his wife, too delicate to endure the standoff.

The *Walking Tall* brand has since been attached to a shortlived TV series, a 2004 remake and the two 1970s sequels included in Shout! Factory's package. The absence of Karlson's intelligence is evident from the stagy, front-porch opening scene of *Walking Tall Part 2*, in which TV hack Earl Bellamy elicits performances as wooden as the sheriff's famed hickory stick, and Swedish-American Viking Bo Svenson takes over as Pusser, as in 1977's *The Final Chapter* (no improvement). Pusser had been set to play himself when his Corvette fatally flipped the day after coming home from his Hollywood screen test – the accident report, displayed in suggestive make-up-your-own-mind fashion, is shown with *Part 2*'s closing credits.
Discs: The green of piney southwestern Tennessee in summertime and the lurid roadhouse red are perfect; shabby documentary featurette *Walking Tall, The Buford Pusser Story* features 'County Historian' Steve Sweat and an amusingly foggy Leif Garrett. (NP)

Yellow Submarine The film's lasting value lies in art director Edelmann's anything-goes approach to conceptual design. The music's pretty good too

Yellow Submarine

George Dunning; UK 1968; EMI/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD anamorphic; 90 minutes; Certificate U; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1 (DVD); Features: commentary, 'Mod Odyssey' featurette, interviews, storyboards, stills gallery, trailer, booklet

Film: Made in just 11 months from commission to completion, Britain's second animated feature (after Halas & Batchelor's *Animal Farm* 14 years earlier) owes far more to Eastern European surrealists such as Walerian Borowczyk and Jan Lenica than it does to Disney, and is all the better for it. Few other than small children will pay much heed to the core narrative about the Beatles being hired to banish the Blue Meanies from Pepperland: the film's lasting value in both pop culture and animation history lies in art director Heinz Edelmann's anything-goes approach to conceptual design and director George Dunning's cheerful willingness to mix and match wildly disparate styles – though, paradoxically, the final film is a marvel of visual

coherence. The music's pretty good too.
Disc: The Blu-ray wasn't supplied for review, but the benefit of the recent frame-by-frame restoration can clearly be seen on the DVD. Of the major extras, the contemporary featurette is a time capsule in itself, while the commentary by production supervisor John Coates (Edelmann pops up at the end) is crammed with fascinating historical detail, not least about working conditions in the British animation industry of the time. (MB)

You Only Live Once

Fritz Lang; US 1937; Studio Canal/ Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 82 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: introduction by George M. Wilson, audio interview with Lang recorded at NFT in 1962, production notes

Film: The second of Lang's American films (and the second in his trio of 'social problem' pictures), *You Only Live Once* is a romantic tragedy whose dark, fatalistic charms failed to grab the public's interest with the 'three-time loser' law's iniquities as *Fury* (1936) had with lynching. Downbeat from the get-go, it sees Henry Fonda's hot-headed ex-jailbird Eddie Taylor cast out of society symbolically by being chased from his honeymoon hotel and his job, even before he's framed for a murderous bank heist. Famous for its rich visuals, and its even richer ambivalences, the film here comes with a useful introduction by George M. Wilson outlining its unreliable narration (poring particularly enjoyably over the literal and metaphorical opacity of the bank robbery, with its tantalising suggestion of Eddie's guilt). The film's perceptual manipulation – everything from Lang's cruelly teasing trio of pre-verdict newspaper headlines to the question of whether the 'gates are open' final shot is hallucinatory rather than redemptive – is also minutely deconstructed. Still, a spot of social context wouldn't have gone amiss, since Sylvia Sidney's wilfully loyal wife Joan, an intriguing blend of stand-by-your-man steadfastness and gradual gun moll, gets short critical shrift, though she incarnates the social and emotional complexities of the 1934 act that had newly criminalised aiding and abetting fugitives.
Disc: Aside from George M. Wilson's compelling crib notes, there's Lang himself being graceful but guarded in a 1962 NFT audio Q&A, covering his entire career. His voice also barks from off screen in MoMA's riveting reel of production takes from the film, readying Henry Fonda and his hostage to emerge from the prison fog: "When I say come, you shall come." (KS)

This month's releases reviewed by Sergio Angelini, Michael Atkinson, Michael Brooke, Mar Diestro-Dópido, Trevor Johnston, Geoffrey Macnab, Nick Pinkerton, Kate Stables and Brad Stevens

LA Law – Season 1

Steven Bochco Productions/Fox/NBC; US 1986-87; Revelation Films/Region 2 DVD; 1,073 minutes; Certificate 15; Aspect Ratio 4:3

Programme: This glossy legal drama was the show that writer-producer Steven Bochco made immediately after being unceremoniously fired from *Hill Street Blues*. While its predecessor revelled in the gritty squalor of its anonymous inner-city chaos, *LA Law* became an instant ratings smash with its carefully calculated mélange of farce, sexual hijinks and hot-button topicality (Aids and gang violence especially), eschewing melancholy resignation for glamour among the beautiful people.

Harry Hamlin stars as the passionate advocate with a deep-rooted sense of the ridiculous (his courtship of Susan Dey's deputy DA sees him don a gorilla suit as part of its clinching argument), while Corbin Bernsen gets most of the laughs as an ultra-slick (and supremely shallow) divorce attorney.

While serious stories do feature prominently – Alfre Woodard guests as the victim of a gang rape terminally ill with leukaemia, for example – it's mostly the comic escapades and the romantic interludes that linger. Chucklesome highlights include the happy outcome of the unlikely seduction of hardboiled courtroom bruiser Ann Kelsey by diminutive tax attorney Stuart Markowitz (played by the real-life couple Jill Eikenberry and Michael Tucker), who eventually wins her over through deployment of the tantric 'Venus Butterfly' technique (his impressed playmate purrs post-coitally, "Where the hell did you learn that?").

Fluent, articulate and consistently well crafted, the show remains every bit as addictive as it was a quarter of a century ago.
Discs: Shot on 35mm but post-produced on video, this show always looked a little soft and is certainly quite fuzzy here. (SA)

Mr Rose – Series 1

Granada/ITV; UK 1967; Network DVD/Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 600 minutes; Aspect Ratio 4:3; Features: stills gallery

Programme: Right from John Snow's up-tempo and mellifluous theme tune (popularised by Roy Budd), we realise that Philip Mackie's continuing adventures of ex-Scotland Yard chief inspector Charles Rose (William Mervyn) redevelop and lighten the character quite considerably since he was originally introduced during the second season of the *noir*ish *It's Dark Outside*. (The generally quirky and off-centre approach to the character was reflected in the title of the first Rose spinoff, *The Odd Man*, 1964-65.)

The new show sees Rose retiring to write his memoirs after receiving a large inheritance from a pair of maiden aunts (one of whom, we later discover, may have been murdered). He never seems to get very far with his book, though, despite the exhortations of his demanding live-in secretary Drusilla (Gillian Lewis). Instead he spends his time solving crimes with the help of his wildly overqualified driver-cum-butler John Halifax, played with scene-stealing machismo by Donald Webster.

This is a light drama that resonates with old-world charm, Rose's Micawberish grandiloquence matching witty tales constructed with a touch of Chestertonian paradox. These include a seaboard adventure with a gentleman burglar who doesn't steal anything, and a shapely scrubber (Halifax tells her, "For a girl with your statistics, you do a lot of reading") who confesses to a murder so as *not* to get caught. The studio-bound production is cheeseparing and Rose's smug and pompous superiority should be exasperating, but the interplay between the three leads really sparkles and Mackie's droll dialogue makes this show a true comic delight.
Discs: The black-and-white telerecordings have not been restored but just about pass muster. (SA)

Mr Rose Witty tales constructed with a touch of Chestertonian paradox… The droll dialogue makes this show a true comic delight

The Sullivans – Volume 1

Crawford Productions/Channel 9; Australia 1976; Medium Rare Entertainment/Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 1,214 minutes; Aspect Ratio 4:3

Programme: Made in emulation of the ITV drama *A Family at War* (1970-72), this evocation of the Second World War as experienced in a Melbourne suburb is more than a mere exercise in nostalgia. It frequently contains remarkable levels of quotidian detail, with the half-hour episodes usually dramatising one or two specific days in the lives of the characters, and dates always identified on screen. Thus we know that the initial 50 episodes collected here (more than 1,100 would be produced in total) span most of the 1939-40 'Phoney War' – there are three episodes devoted to Christmas Day alone.

The show begins uncertainly with a faux-naif voiceover from Kitty, the youngest of the four Sullivan children: "We're just going off on a secret adventure. If we'd have known what was going to happen to us, though, we'd never have started." While the usual soap-bubble mixture of buried secrets, love affairs and misunderstandings predominates, the dark events befalling the Kaufman family, German émigrés who run the local store, are handled with sensitivity and plausibility.

Among the large cast of regulars outside the eponymous family, the real breakout star here is Vivean Gray as the Sullivans' gossipy and snooty neighbour Mrs Jessup, the obvious comic relief who was slowly humanised and strengthened during the show's seven-year run.
Discs: As befits the era, 16mm film elements look rather pale, and video colours are occasionally a little 'hot', but both have generally been capably rendered to disc. There are no extras, though the textual episode recaps are very handy. (SA)

BOOK OF THE MONTH

Anatomy of a movie

Michael Brooke *is absorbed by a comprehensive study of Hitchcock's penultimate work*

Alfred Hitchcock's Frenzy: The Last Masterpiece

By Raymond Foery, Scarecrow Press, 202pp, £24.95, ISBN 9780810877559

In content and style, if not author and publisher, Raymond Foery's book reads like a conscious sequel to Stephen Rebello's 1990 book 'Alfred Hitchcock and the Making of Psycho' (currently being filmed as 'Hitchcock', with Anthony Hopkins in the title role). Despite Foery's academic credentials, it's a pacy, accessible read, covering the production of Hitchcock's penultimate film in similarly exhaustive and often fascinating detail.

Like Rebello's book, this opens with Hitchcock in a professional quandary, in this case having made two flops in a row ('Torn Curtain' and 'Topaz'). As with 'Psycho', he initially had difficulty finding a studio prepared to back 'Frenzy' or anything similar (such as an aborted and unrelated 1967 serial-killer project known as either 'Frenzy' or 'Kaleidoscope') – though, as before, it went on to become a big commercial hit.

Although there was little love lost between Hitchcock and source novelist Arthur La Bern (whose blistering letter to The Times challenging the paper's favourable review is quoted in full), the screenwriting collaboration with Anthony Shaffer was one of the director's happiest – they intended to continue it on Hitchcock's next project 'Family Plot' until scheduling conflicts intervened. Who specifically wrote what has largely gone with Hitchcock and Shaffer to their graves, but their correspondence suggests that they were more often in creative synch than otherwise, and sequences original to the film such as the running gag about Chief Inspector Oxford's wife's culinary ambitions clearly suited their shared gastronomic interests and wicked sense of fun.

Foery also confirms that the film's much-criticised anachronisms were not merely intentional on Hitchcock's part but specifically requested of Shaffer over the latter's occasional objections: Hitchcock had no intention of creating a realistic portrait of his native city, and this London greengrocer's son also made a point of filming extensively on location in the old Covent Garden Market after he'd heard about its planned closure. A subtler nod comes with the choice of Henrietta Street as the location of the killer Rusk's flat: Clemence Dane, author of the source novel of Hitchcock's 1930 film 'Murder!' and a popular history of Covent Garden, also lived there.

An account of the film's casting throws up intriguing alternatives (Michael Caine as Rusk, Vanessa Redgrave as his first onscreen victim, Laurence Olivier as Oxford), but in the end Hitchcock favoured reliable British character actors who could be trusted to deliver with the minimum of explicit direction. In this respect, the Alec McCowen/Vivien Merchant double act as the Oxfords served him perfectly.

'Frenzy': Barry Foster as Rusk with Barbara Leigh-Hunt as his victim Brenda

Unlike Rebello, Foery has worked entirely from secondary sources, and while these seemingly include every extant document regarding the production and reception of 'Frenzy', as well as the extensive body of wider Hitchcock scholarship (including the production featurette on the US DVD release, which interviewed many now-deceased participants), he hasn't talked directly to surviving cast and crew members. In particular, the section on Jon Finch's difficult relationship with Hitchcock might have benefited from the actor's input.

Hitchcock had no intention of creating a realistic portrayal of his native city

Hitchcock: "greengrocer's son"

But the book's major strength (and it's arguably superior in this respect to Rebello's anecdotal approach) is the way it parallels the account of the production with a detailed analysis of Hitchcock's visual style. An entire chapter is devoted to the notion of Hitchcock as the "Master of Space", and the cinematic purpose and achievement of the film's celebrated camera movements are especially emphasised. The emotional impact of the most famous of these, after Rusk enters his flat with his latest victim, was scripted thus: "THE CAMERA, as if saying goodbye to Babs, retreats down the stairs and out through the front door." Much attention is also paid to the famously prolonged "brick wall" shot prior to Monica's discovery of her boss's murder: in post-production, Hitchcock meticulously adjusted its timing by seconds and then frames.

Foery also builds on Bill Krohn's research for 'Hitchcock at Work' (2000) in debunking the legend that Hitchcock's scripts and storyboards were perfect blueprints of the finished work; although the 'Frenzy' shoot was certainly highly efficient, things nonetheless changed during production. The book concludes with an overview of the film's reputation, including a section on its (and Hitchcock's) alleged misogyny.

The book's subtitle makes Foery's own position clear, but in giving the film's detractors a sympathetically reported voice, he's clearly aiming for a definitive overview. And though there are a few very minor nit-picks (while he covers the shooting of less sexually and linguistically graphic material intended for TV versions, he ignores the film's passage through the MPAA and BBFC, despite the latter requesting cuts that weren't restored until 2001), in this he has largely succeeded.

FURTHER READING

Ken Russell's Dracula

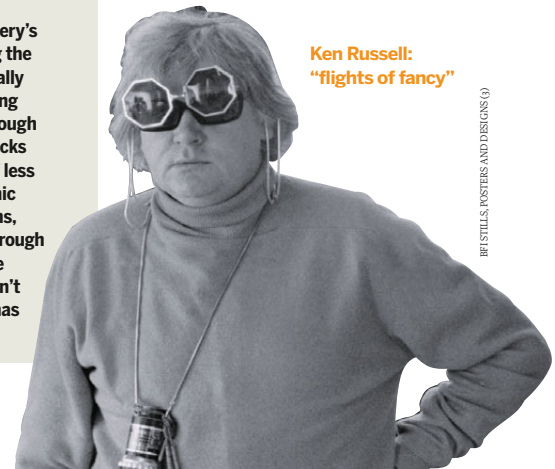
With an introduction by Paul Sutton, Bear Claw Publishing, 166pp, £7, ISBN 9780957246218

In 1978 Ken Russell adapted Bram Stoker's novel for producer Martin Poll (*The Lion in Winter*), who suggested Mick Fleetwood, drummer of Fleetwood Mac, as a possible Dracula. It didn't get made, Russell explains, because three other versions of the much-adapted story were in the pipeline: John Badham's *Dracula*, with Frank Langella; Werner Herzog's *Nosferatu the Vampyre*, with Klaus Kinski; and the spoof *Love at First Bite*. Presumably Russell was also aware of the BBC's 1977 *Count Dracula* with Louis Jourdan and the made-for-TV 1974 *Dracula*, starring Jack Palance and Fiona Lewis (bitten by a vampire Wagner in Russell's *Lisztomania*) as Lucy.

In his introduction to this first-ever publication of Russell's script, Russell biographer Paul Sutton notes that Francis Ford Coppola's 1992 *Dracula*, with Gary Oldman, uses Russellian transitions. More suspiciously, far more details from his adaptation, tweaked from the novel, have parallels in W.D. Richter's script for Badham's film, from an early 20th-century backdrop to a reciprocal, consummated relationship between vampire and heroine. As in the Badham and Herzog versions, Russell's Van Helsing is useless and killed off before the climax. Not entirely seriously, Russell stirs added bandits, a fight in a train, several redemptions and an ironic impalement into Stoker's already potent mix of melodrama and mysticism, bookended by an opening in which all the horrors of Transylvania are put on as a charade to spook Jonathan Harker.

Russell seems to have been proud of his high concept of a Dracula sustained through the centuries by appreciation of great art, though it's undeveloped in this draft. This Count wishes to make Lucy (here, an opera singer) immortal, and hints he's done the same for others.

Like all unmade scripts, this is tantalising. A personal touch is changing the British locations from Whitby and London to Russell's home turf in Southampton, but flights of fancy that might have yielded Russellian visionary sequences are sketches awaiting further inspiration. And as for Mick Fleetwood – what were they thinking of? **Kim Newman**



Ken Russell: "flights of fancy"

BFI STILLS, POSTERS AND DESIGNS (3)

Historical Dictionary of Japanese Cinema

By Jasper Sharp, Scarecrow Press, 564pp, £59.95, ISBN 9780810857957

These days the first question any new reference book has to answer is this: isn't all this information readily available for free online? But although Jasper Sharp's *Historical Dictionary of Japanese Cinema* draws on some of his writings for the Midnight Eye website, and he acknowledges a big debt to the magazine *Kinema Junpo*'s Japanese Movie Database website, there's no doubt that he delivers in ways that internet searches don't. This book is essentially a synoptic history of Japanese cinema, arranged in the form of a dictionary to make it easier and quicker to find information, and it would take many shots in the internet dark to piece together any one of these entries, let alone over 500 pages of them.

The book leaves most previous synoptic histories standing, not only because it's more up-to-date but also because it ranges into the pop-genre, *anime* and indie areas which its predecessors have tended to shun. Animators like Otomo Katsuhiro (*Akira*), Oshii Mamoru (*Ghost in the Shell*) and Miyazaki Hayao (*Spirited Away*) are given as much space and respect as, say, Kurosawa, Ozu and Mizoguchi. I haven't counted, but directors seem to get the most individual entries, outnumbering actors, producers and other creative personnel; there are also a few entries on prominent writers whose novels have often been adapted into films.

BFI STILLS, POSTERS AND DESIGNS (1)

'Spirited Away': this dictionary gives as much space to Miyazaki as to Kurosawa

All of these notes are fundamentally bio-filmographies, with career trajectories written out rather than reduced to lists, and only minimal attempts at criticism. On top of these, there are mini-histories of all the main production companies, essays on the major genres and on a few particularly influential films, and thematic essays on such topics as "Censorship", "The Atomic Bomb" and "War and Film". A few Japanese terms are explained in notes; many others are explained more succinctly in an appended glossary, alongside lists of names and titles in Japanese.

The range cannot be encyclopedic, but the last hundred pages expand the book's scope with a sprawling bibliography which selectively lists everything from books and magazine articles about individual talents to genre studies and books on Japanese culture and history as a whole. (Sadly missing for space reasons is any listing of the essays written for DVD and Blu-ray liner-note booklets – a growth area in recent years, and ironically the area where some of Sharp's own best writing can be found.)

Browsing, I've found a few minor errors, mostly in the one-line summaries of films that Sharp obviously hasn't seen; he also mangles several Chinese names (Ann Hui and Jiang Wen won't be pleased) and, oddly for a specialist, misreads director Mori Issei's name as "Mori Kazuo" on all but one occasion. More generally, it's a touch disappointing that Sharp pussyfoots around political questions and seems deeply nervous about homosexuality whenever it crops up.

The one thing I find truly baffling about the book, however, is a policy it shares with almost all other Western-language studies of Japanese culture. Japan has a syllabary called *katakana* which is used specifically to transcribe foreign words into Japanese. Sharp, like 99 per cent of his peers, doesn't transliterate *katakana* words back into their original form but instead laboriously spells out the Japanese syllables. So Oshima's *Ai no Corrida*, for instance, appears as "*Ai no Korida*", erasing the Spanish reference and meaning. Makes no sense to me.

Tony Rayns

Setting the Scene: The Art and Evolution of Animation Layout

By Fraser MacLean, Chronicle Books, 270pp, £40, ISBN 9780811869874

Part of the difficulty of writing about animation layout lies in pinning down what it actually means. It happens in-between storyboarding and creating the final background images in the animation-production process; but while it can be the job of an individual or a whole department, it is quite often an undefined principle shared across a variety of other creative roles. Fraser MacLean, the author of this remarkable book on a little-considered subject, describes it as the art of finding the best way to "frame and illuminate the images in order to tell the story". Chuck Jones said of his most celebrated layout man Maurice Noble: "He created a world in which animation could flourish."

The author structures his book around the problems of animation production that have been solved by an increasingly organised approach to the layout process. Early animators quickly established that pre-thinking was required to ensure that the animated characters could be clearly seen in front of the background scene, particularly in black and white. The drive towards realism in animation that came to fruition in the Disney feature films of the late 1930s and 40s – as well as technical developments like sophisticated, sometimes multiplane rostrum cameras – meant that the newly emerging layout departments became more and more important. MacLean quotes Disney layout artist Ken O'Connor as saying, "The layout department holds the purse strings of a production."

Suspicions that this might seem a dry, technical subject are quickly dismissed by even a quick flick through the copious, carefully researched and beautifully presented images between the handsome covers of this book. MacLean has clearly spent many hours trawling private, commercial and archive collections looking for the right examples to illustrate his points. And even more importantly, those points themselves are in most cases raised by one of the over 100 animation practitioners interviewed for the book.

MacLean deliberately chooses examples from films the general reader will be familiar with. Case studies and illustrations of Disney and Pixar films dominate the book, just as they have the public imagination. And yet this is not just a tour of the well-beaten path; the films of the Fleischer Studios, for instance, are given welcome appreciation too. Design work for television such as *The Jetsons* is not dismissed as 'limited' animation, but properly evaluated within the context in which it was made. As MacLean writes, "It's vitally important, when we look back at the animation design of any particular era, to remain aware at all times of the medium toward which the specific design was pitched."

'The Jetsons': "properly evaluated"

The book deliberately limits its focus to US commercial animation. A section on Japanese animation was researched but left out, apparently on the assumption that it would be a distraction from the main themes because its history and practice were so different. More avant-garde and independent animation is also absent, presumably for the same reasons. The lack of any mention of UPA (*Mr. Magoo, Gerald McBoing-Boing* etc) is perhaps more troubling, particularly as the studio's influence clearly spilled into Disney's mainstream production of the 1950s.

The similarities and differences of layout in CG animation are ably covered, with MacLean rightly highlighting that while more complex camera positions and movements are possible in the digital realm, creatives are increasingly boxed within the conventions of live action. Ex-Disney animator Andreas Deja recently wrote a plea on his blog calling for CG studios to be brave enough to take an "artistic left-turn" away from hyperrealism. MacLean's book carries a similar message, with its most memorable examples being traditional animation backgrounds where natural perspective and the laws of physics are bent, broken or ignored completely for narrative effect. And why do these examples stand out with an abiding message? Because, like a good layout artist, MacLean has structured his book to "frame and illuminate the images in order to tell the story".

Jez Stewart

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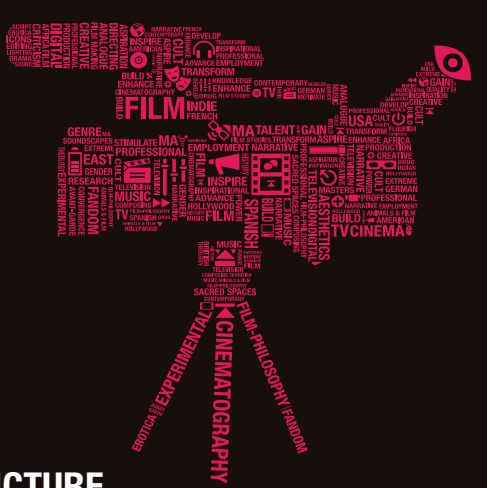

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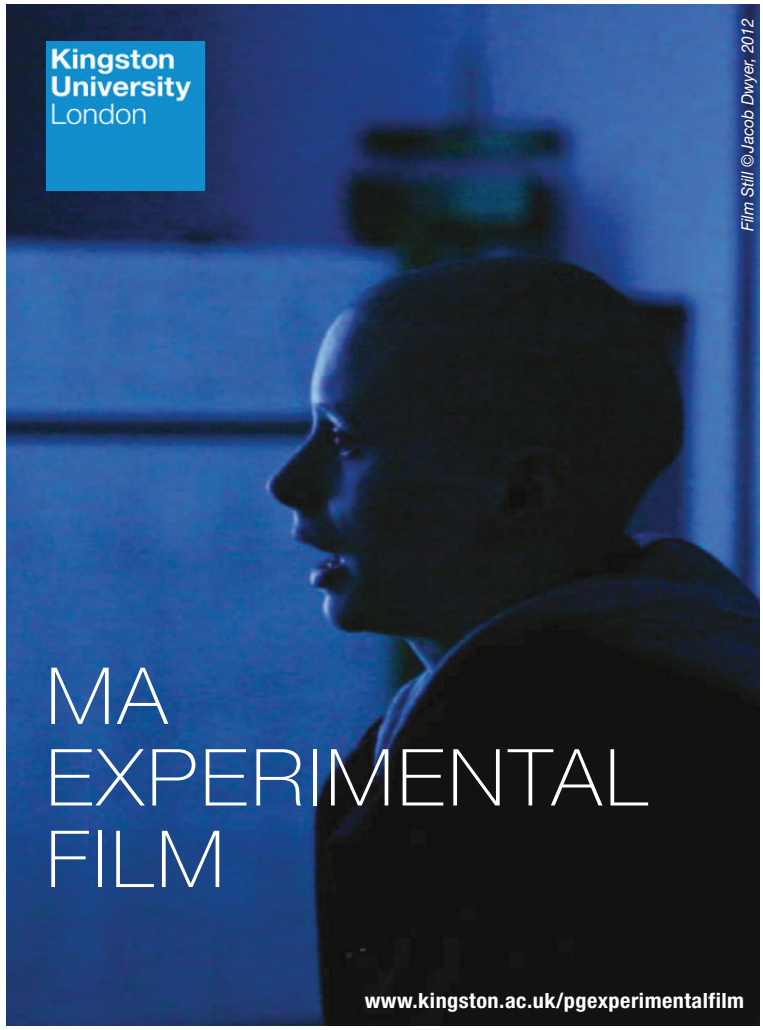

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A cheap shot

Roger Clarke, in his review of *Arirang* (*S&S*, June), tags Kim Ki-duk a misogynist. I could agree to disagree about that, but he goes on to gloat over an actress being involved in a near-fatal accident on one of Kim's sets, as though this somehow supports his thesis. This is a nasty tabloid shot, particularly as the incident in question appears to have contributed to Kim suffering a nervous breakdown. Clarke's sneering comment about *Arirang* being a drinking song also reveals him to be, at best, ill-informed. It is an old and revered folk song, a kind of unofficial Korean national anthem, and about as much of a drinking song as *Jerusalem* is in England.

Clarke's whole piece is less about the film under review than the bee he already has in his bonnet about Kim. I don't know why the editor thinks *S&S* readers might be interested in this, and I for one feel a bit short-changed.

Paul Cunningham
South Korea

Cinema paradiso

Ian Francis's piece 'Tangerine dreams' (Rushes, *S&S*, June), which touched on the restoration of Tangier's Cinema Rif as the new Cinematheque, reminded me of one of the city's other wonderful old art-deco cinemas: the long-closed Cine Alcazar in Rue de l'Italie. Over 20 years ago it was given a lick of paint and kitted out with a couple of 1940s posters (for the Max Ophuls film *Sans lendemain*) for its cameo appearance in Bertolucci's *The Sheltering Sky*. But since then it seems to have remained closed. Let's hope the vibrant Tangier film scene referred to in Francis's piece will change its fortunes too.

Paul Janes
Port Sunlight, Wirral

Culture of resistance?

I was very interested to read Philip Kemp's piece on Helmut Käutner's *Under the Bridges* ('Lost & Found', *S&S*, June). But I have to say I wasn't quite convinced by the idea that, in failing to make any reference to Nazism or the war in a love story filmed in wartime Germany in 1945, the director was in some sense tacitly resisting the Nazi regime. This seems like a classic case of hindsight.

If the Germans had won the war, I wonder if David Lean would later have been praised by the Nazi victors for gritting his teeth through compulsory propagandist assignments like *In Which We Serve*, only to show his true, heroic anti-Churchill colours by refusing to make any reference to or acknowledgement of the Allied war effort in *Brief Encounter*, another escapist love story shot during the dying days of World War II!

Tina Engstrom
Stockholm

Overexposed: Wes Anderson

The illustrated man

In his feature on Wes Anderson's *Moonrise Kingdom* (*S&S*, June), Nick Pinkerton concedes that the main criticism of the director's films is that they are too alike. So it is a surprise that you continue to promote this one-note director by putting him on the cover. However, it was fitting that you chose to illustrate him because by far his best film to date has been his foray into animation, *Fantastic Mr. Fox*.

Therefore I look forward to the continuation of this policy to promote feature-film directors whose best work has been in animation, and anticipate seeing future illustrated covers devoted to Brad Bird and Andrew Stanton.

Charles Brown
Long Ditton, Surrey

Another Marvel

In Sophie Mayer's excellent *Avengers Assemble* review (*S&S*, June) she overlooked Louis Leterrier's *The Incredible Hulk* when talking about Joss Whedon's film as a sequel to a run of previous Marvel Studio movies (she mentions only the two *Iron Man* films, *Thor* and *Captain America*). The events of Leterrier's 2008 film definitely have a bearing on Whedon's plot; moreover, Robert Downey Jr as Tony 'Iron Man' Stark can be seen in *The Incredible Hulk* in one of the now-standard post-credit scenes, forming part of the ongoing continuity that runs between the Marvel Studio movies produced in-house (as opposed to *Spider-Man*, *X-Men* and Ang Lee's much-maligned first take on filming the Hulk, where the film rights are owned by Fox and Sony).

Oliver Vincent
By email

Special treatment

I thoroughly enjoyed your article 'The Early Life of Colonel Blimp' (*S&S*, June), particularly the behind-the-scenes access it provided to Emeric Pressburger's original 25-page treatment. Your suggestion that "Powell – often seen primarily as the director in the team – may have had some hand in writing the film's perfectly tuned dialogue" is spot on. As Powell himself once commented re *A Canterbury Tale*, made the year after *Blimp*: "While Emeric was learning English very fast, his dialogue still had to be rewritten by me... The shape of the scenes would be impeccable, however."

Jim Lymes
Oxford

LETTER OF THE MONTH

The limits of control

May I be allowed to add some observations to Geoffrey Macnab's article 'Hungarian Disharmonies' (*S&S*, June)? By concentrating on the notion of art versus commercial cinema, as antagonistically personified by Béla Tarr (director of *The Turin Horse*, right) and Andy Vajna, I think Macnab downplays the role of state policy under the right-wing government of Viktor Orbán, the Hungarian prime minister. There is a strong argument that the appointment of Vajna is part of a wider government policy that involves rampant cronyism and a top-down 'statist' or 'Caesarist' approach to virtually all aspects of society – but particularly to the arts, culture and education. To put it crudely, the issue is not so much one of reform, as the article suggests, but of control. The list of government appointees who are relations, colleagues or friends of Orbán is now quite astonishing, and has become something of a standing joke in Hungary – and Vajna is no exception within this trend.

It may be true that Vajna "demanded (and received) full independence when he took on the job of commissioner", but this ignores the whole question of the framework within which this job was established and the way that Vajna's own attitudes and practice fit so neatly with those of the government. It is difficult to have much faith in a commissioner whose legal adviser (nicknamed 'The Pit Bull') openly declares that he has never seen a Hungarian film. The decision by Vajna to severely cut funding for animation and documentary and, in effect, hand this over to TV has been condemned vociferously by such highly respected Hungarian documentarists as Tamás Almási and Gábor Papp. Some funding will be available if supported and backed by TV, but the present economic climate makes this uncertain (and unlike Polish TV, Hungarian TV companies, with a notable exception, don't have a good track record in financing and supporting film production).

Hungary, this most cinematic of small nations, doesn't needs the likes of further transatlantic imports such as Joe Eszterhas or Oliver Stone to teach it how to make films. The record of István Szabó, Miklós Jancsó, Marta Mészáros, András Jeles, Kornél Mundruczó, György Pálfi, Ferenc Török, Béla Tarr, Ágnes Kocsis – and many, many more – speaks for itself.

John Cunningham
Sheffield

Additions & corrections

June p.54 *The Angels' Share*: Cert 15, 101m 0s, 9,090 ft +0 frames (cuts made by dialogue substitution); p.56 *Avengers Assemble*: uncredited: voice of Hulk: Lou Ferrigno; p.61 *Even the Rain*: Cert 15, 102m 51s, 9,256 ft +8 frames; p.64 *Himizu*: Not submitted for theatrical classification, video certificate: 18, 129m 32s, Shota Sometani plays Yuichi Sumida. Fumi Nikaido plays Keiko Chazawa; p.66 *If I Want to Whistle, I Whistle*: Cert 15, 93m 31s, 8,416 ft +8 frames; p.67 *The Innkeepers*: Cert 15, 101m 9s, 9,103 ft +8 frames UK distributor is Metrodome Distribution Ltd ; p.71 *Mitsuko Delivers*: Not submitted for theatrical classification, video certificate: PG, 108m 52s; p.72 *Monsieur Lazhar*, Cert 15, 94m 54s, 8,541 ft +0 frames; p.72 *The Pact*: 1.85:1; p. 74 *The Raid*: Cert 18, 100m 52s, 9,078 ft +0 frames, UK release title is *The Raid* – not *The Raid: Redemption*; p.75 *Red Tails*, Cert 12A, 124m 38s, 11,217 ft +0 frames; p.76 *Tales of the Night*: Cert PG, 83m 45s, 7,537 ft +8 frames, Mac Giff Ligne should read Mac Guff Ligne; p.82 *Wrath of the Titans*: Toby Kebbell plays Agenor

READER OFFERS see page 32 for details

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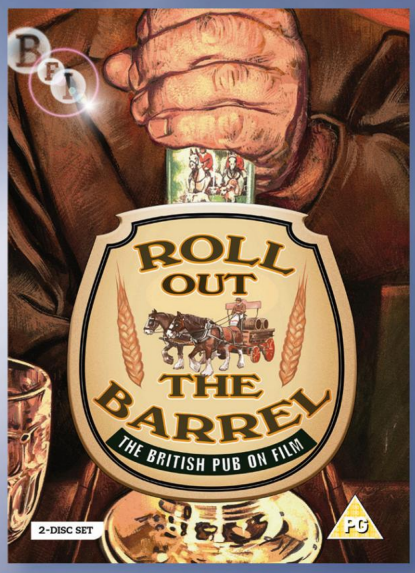

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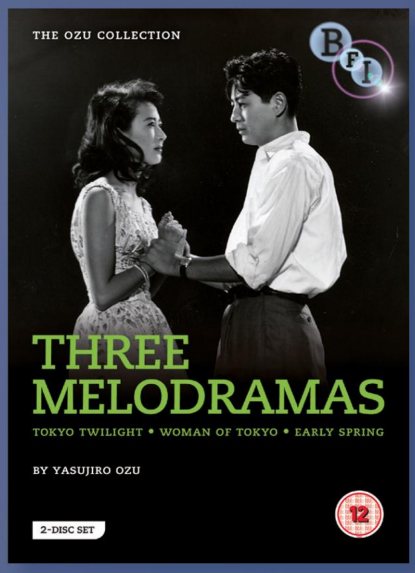

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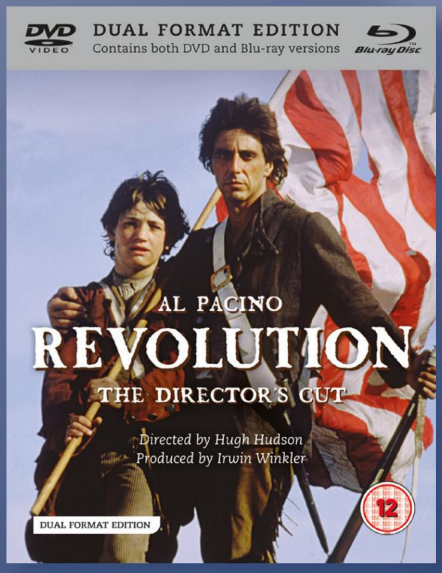

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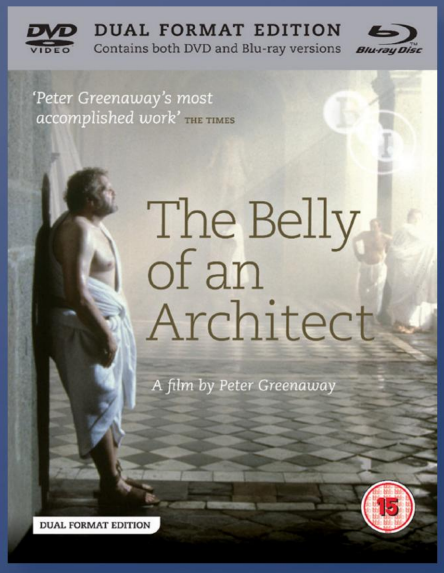

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